

THE ARGOSY.

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THE MISTRESS OF BRAE FARM

BY ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ELLISON'S LETTER.

THE letter that Lorraine had read with such anguish that morning had been written by Ellison during one of her tedious night watches. The sad news received earlier in the day had completely unnerved her, and for some hours she had found it impossible to write a word; but in the silence and solitude of the night some degree of calmness had returned to her. Those words of womanly sympathy and tenderness flowing straight from Ellison's good heart were treasured by Lorraine for many a long year.

"My dear, my own poor dear, if I were only not so far away from you," she wrote; "to think that this awful trouble has come to you, and that I cannot take you in my arms and try to comfort you. Oh, how hard it seems!

"If I were only free, I would travel day and night to be with you; but Lorraine, dear, how am I to leave poor Margaret? She is in such suffering, she cannot move without agony; and we have no one but an ignorant peasant woman to help us. Margaret is so delicate; her heart has always been weak, and of course this makes us terribly anxious. Mr. Mervyn seems distracted; he is one of those men who are so helpless in an emergency—so different from my cousin Gavin. There is nothing he would not do for Margaret; but he is too nervous and incapable to be of much use in a sick room. I have to think of everything—to give orders, and scold him into taking proper food and exercise. Ah, if you knew how heartsick and homesick I am—how I am longing for a sight of your dear face; but how am I to leave them! I have written fully to Cousin Louise. At least,

dearest, you are not utterly alone. I hear Muriel is with you, and I know how devoted she will be, and Cousin Louise and Gavin will look after you. I must trust you to them. Promise me—promise me—for are we not like sisters—you and I—that you will let them do their best for you. I cannot trust myself to write more to-night. When I think of that poor darling I cannot write for tears. God comfort you, my poor Lorraine. In a day or two I will write again." This was much of the substance of her letter.

"You will like to read it," Lorraine said simply, as she handed the letter to Gavin. She had not shown it to Muriel. Gavin's hand shook a little as he perused it silently.

"It is just what I expected her to write," he observed, as he replaced the letter reverently in the envelope. "She has written all particulars to my mother; but her letter is so sad, that I should not care for you to see it. Ellison feels it terribly. She tells my mother that she cannot rid herself of the thought that in some way she is responsible for the accident; one understands what she means. Ellison is not the least morbid: but the idea that that poor little fellow met his death in such a way while he was under her charge gives her exquisite pain. 'It would have been better if I had left them in Beaumont Street.' That is what she said."

Then a flush crossed Lorraine's wan face.

"No; she must not think that," she returned, in a low voice. "Dr. Howell was talking to me yesterday. I know now that my darling could not have been long with me—that his little life was doomed. She has made his last months so happy. Oh, what a spring and summer it has been! How he loved the birds and the flowers, and those long days in the woods! When you write to Ellison you must tell her this. He was just pining away and wasting to skin and bone in Beaumont Street. Dr. Howell told me plainly that if I had kept him there he would not have been alive now. It was kind of him to tell me all this—was it not, Colonel Trevor? It makes it easier for me to bear. I think he had not a moment's pain. Dr. Howell assures me that his little heart was so weak that the shock of the fall and the cold water must have killed him instantly. It is a comfort to know this."

She spoke in the weak, strained voice that had become habitual to her. Her eyes looked heavy as though she had slept little. Even in this little time she had grown perceptibly thinner; as he talked to her he noticed that her wedding-ring was almost slipping from her finger. She had got into a restless habit of pushing it up and down, and it somehow fascinated him; but he averted his eyes.

"By-the-bye," he said, trying to speak in his ordinary manner, "I have brought those plans to show you. I was busy over them yesterday. I suppose Muriel told you."

"Yes," returned Lorraine slowly; "and your mother wrote to me. What am I to say, Colonel Trevor?"

"I hope you will say nothing"—for he saw how her lips were quivering. "Don't you know what a pleasure it will be to your friends? It is just what Ellison would have wished, and my mother is writing this morning to tell her about it."

"And you will not even let me thank you. Wait a moment, Colonel Trevor, I must say something before I look at those plans that you have so kindly drawn. It does seem so wonderful; last night, when I could not sleep, I could not help fretting because I had no money, and I did so long to put up a little marble cross for my darling, it broke my heart to think I could not do even that for him; and I made up my mind that when Ellison came back I would ask her to let me do without dresses and put the money by for this; and then as we sat at breakfast Muriel told me what you all intended to do. 'It is my brother's idea, but mother and Ellison and I will all join,' that is what Muriel said. No, I cannot thank you, it goes too deep for mere thanks!"

"And I may fetch my plans?" But he did not wait for her permission, and very soon they were both absorbed over the drawings. Gavin was no mean draughtsman, and his designs were skilfully and gracefully done.

"They are all beautiful, but I like this one best," she said presently. "I think for a child everything should be so simple—and that dove nestling under the cross is such a lovely idea!"

"Then it shall be carried out at once. And now about the inscription; his name was only Theodore, was it not? Is there any special text you have selected, or shall we wait a little?"

"I have chosen two—they are very short, so perhaps I may have both—'Suffer the little children to come unto me,' just those words, and 'He shall gather the lambs with His arm,' the dove and the cross will tell the rest. 'Theodore Herbert, aged three years and two months.' Muriel agreed with me that I could not do better!" And then as he rolled up the papers and prepared to take his leave she looked at him wistfully. "How kind you are to take all this trouble, and you have only known us such a few months. Sometimes at night I think how I have taken all your kindness as a matter of course, and never even thanked you."

"One does not want to be thanked for a little civility," returned Gavin lightly; but if Lorraine knew how her grateful look was torturing him! Why had Muriel left them together; it was just her gaucherie and want of thought, but he dare not trust himself a moment longer; but as he walked through the farmyard and long meadow he could not get her out of his thoughts. The slight, tall figure swaying a little from weakness, the pale sweet face, the thin hand with its loose wedding-ring, how pathetic it all was; but it was her eyes that tried him most; how their sadness seemed to appeal to him. "Heaven help me, how am I to get through the next few weeks?" he said to himself. "There seems a fatality in things;

because there are not difficulties enough there is poor Ellison eating out her heart with home-sickness and worry in that Tyrolean valley."

"Should he go to her?" the thought came to him with a sort of shock startling him out of his apathy. "After all his duty was more to her than to Lorraine. Should he speak to his mother about it and find out her opinion? She was very clear-headed and would tell him exactly what she thought; but then as he remembered her plans for him and Ellison he wavered a little. No, she would not be impartial, her own wishes would insensibly warp her judgment; she would bid him go to Ellison and do all in her power to remove every obstacle, and for the time Mrs. Herbert would go to the wall. No, I dare not leave," he finished, and then he drew a long breath of relief, "my mother's state is too precarious; yesterday I did not like the look of her. I must have McCallum down again and hear his opinion. Ellison would be the first to tell me that I ought to remain if she knew the state my mother is in; and then in her letter she has begged us to look after Mrs. Herbert. Could anything be plainer than that sentence in my mother's letter—'If it were not for you and Gavin and Muriel I should be utterly miserable about Lorraine; but I know what good friends you will be to her and how tenderly you will care for her. Tell Gavin that I leave the farm and everything else in his charge. Sam Brattle must go to him for orders. Lorraine cannot look after things just now. I am writing to Mrs. Tucker and telling her the same. Poor dear Lorraine must be spared everything as much as possible.'"

He quite understood why Ellison had written to his mother; it had been part of the compact that no letters were to pass between them, and though circumstances had compelled him to break the silence, and it had been his painful task to tell Ellison the sad news, he knew well that she would not answer him directly. "Tell Gavin how I thank him for his long kind letter, and give him my love." That was her sole message; but Gavin's eyes sharpened by love and fear read truly between the lines.

Those weeks of absence had done much for him. Before the first fortnight was over Ellison was already suffering pangs of home-sickness, and even the glorious sights that surrounded her could not console her for her exile from all she loved best, and the thought of a certain bronzed face with deep-set eyes made her heart beat more quickly and brought a sudden flush to her face.

That evening, at the gate of the Woodlands, Ellison had reached the crisis of her life! from the moment Gavin's lips had touched her brow, her old careless, maidenly content and friendship had merged into something deeper and truer, and her heart had passed out of her own keeping for ever. Love had come to her unsought, and certainly undesired, and had fettered even her strong will. No girl in her teens waiting and longing for her lover chafed more impatiently than she did at her exile. She yearned for Gavin's presence, for the sight of

his face and the sound of his voice as she had never yearned for mortal thing before, and at such times the sound of music or even the sight of two rustic lovers walking hand in hand under the pine trees brought the tears to her eyes. How patient and gentle he had been with her that evening, and how cowardly and unaccountably she had behaved. Why had she feared so to listen to his wooing? What foolish perversity and self-will compelled her to enforce these conditions of silence? She had loved him then if she would only have owned it, and it was her own fault that they were not engaged.

"I will never behave so foolishly again," she said to herself night after night as she sat thinking in her bare little bedroom. "He is so honest and straightforward that he deserves equal openness on my part; I have treated him badly though he will never tell me so. Well, if I can only get back to him I will try and make up to him for all my perversity, he shall never have reason to complain of me again—never—never!"

Ellison beguiled many weary hours in the sick-room by dreaming happily about the future. Old Mrs. Langton was breaking fast, and Ferncliffe would soon be empty. She knew Mrs. Trevor and Muriel would be able to live there as they had always intended if Gavin married again. "There will be no need for Lorraine to leave the Farm," she thought; "Gavin would never wish me to part with her. Brae House is so near that she will not feel too lonely; we must try and interest her as much as we can; if she could only realize that she is helping me by looking after things she will feel better. I must not leave her just yet; Gavin is so thoughtful and unselfish that he will never ask it; he will know how terrible this first winter will be to her. Poor Lorraine, she is so young still; she has probably a long life before her; if she could only marry again. It may be my fancy, but it has struck me once or twice that Mr. Vincent admires her; he is always so eager to walk or talk with her. That evening at Brae he did not seem quite like himself; but there, I will not weave nonsensical fancies any more," and Ellison took up the stout grey stocking she was knitting with a resolute air.

And then the thought came to Ellison what if some day she should see Gavin striding up the steep little street, what if he should take her by surprise, and the rough little *char-à-banc* should set him down with his portmanteau. The mere idea made her head swim with a sort of vertigo. Well, it would be only like him. She knew exactly how he would look and what he would say. "I have come to take care of you. Are you glad to see me, Ellison?" and there would be no doubt about her answer. The gladness would be on her face, and they would walk down to the pine woods and listen to the Angelus, and there would be no fear in her heart at all, only an intense joy that her dearest friend was beside her again.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CLOUDS RETURN.

THREE weeks had passed since Tedo's death ; but Lorraine had not yet found courage to go up to Brae. In the evening she always stole out of the house followed by the faithful Tweed, and walked through the long meadow and lane to the common on her way to the churchyard. Mr. Vincent met her more than once as he went down to open the men's evening club ; but he never ventured to accost her. She would pass him hurriedly with a gently-uttered "Good evening" ; but something in her manner prevented him from addressing her. But Hugo and Edmund had no such scruples ; on most evenings they would be waiting for her at the little side gate with their offerings of wild-flowers.

Hugo would push his posy towards her without raising his eyes. "They are his favourite flowers ; he once said so. Will you make room for them, please?" The touch of those hot, rough little hands, and the sight of the half withered posy always affected Lorraine strangely.

"Thank you, Hughie," she would say gently. "Have you been far? You look so hot and tired." Those few short moments as she stood there holding his hand and looking down at him with that unsteady, pitiful smile, were the sweetest in the whole day to Hugo. The boy's affectionate heart clave to his friend with a perfect passion of gratitude.

"She never noticed Eddie. She forgot to take his flowers, and he cried about it ; but she never forgets to take mine," he said triumphantly to Nora ; and wet or fine, whatever he might be doing, he always put his occupation aside to keep his tryst at the yew-tree gate.

Lorraine always hid her pain bravely ; but when she left him, she would often stand still and sob quietly in a heart-broken manner. The sight of him always brought so vividly the memory of that terrible afternoon. Tweed would push his long, black nose affectionately into her hand when he heard her. The faithful creature seemed to share her sorrow. He would lie beside her patiently for hours ; but his favourite resting-place was by the empty crib. If Lorraine missed him she always found him there.

Lorraine would grow calmer after she had sat by the grave a little. The silence and the gathering dusk always rested her. As she walked back in the soft summer gloaming it would seem to her sometimes as though a tiny figure walked beside her. It was a sweet fancy, but she kept it to herself ; but Muriel, watching for her by the lighted window, would wonder to see the tranquil expression of her face.

"How long you have been, dear Mrs. Herbert; but you do not look tired. Were Hugo and Eddie there as usual?"

"Yes; and Hugo had gathered some long sprays of traveller's joy. He had been all the way to Bramfield; but they were sadly withered. No, I am not tired; the walk has refreshed me," and then she would sit down and forget to take off her hat until Muriel reminded her.

Muriel went daily to see her mother. She always brought back a good report of her. "Mother was arranging flowers as usual," she would say. "She seemed so busy that I did not stay long. She sends her love, and hopes you will not trouble about her, as she and Gavin get on very well."

This was Muriel's usual formula. Sometimes Lorraine wondered over it in a vague sort of way. If Mrs. Trevor were so well, it was strange that she never came down to the farm. Muriel was always hinting her surprise; but neither she nor Lorraine guessed at the little daily drama that was enacted for their mutual benefit.

Muriel always went up to Brae at a certain hour, and Mrs. Trevor took care to be dressed and in her sitting-room by the time her daughter arrived. More than once she crept into the conservatory; but the effort wearied her too much. She would sit at her table turning over her silks and embroidery and pretending to work; but she put in few stitches.

If Muriel had returned ten minutes later she would have found her mother lying on the couch looking white and exhausted. "You are not fit to be up at all, ma'am," Collins would say, with a vexed look at the table. "Why does not Miss Muriel stay with you a little while the master is out? I shall be giving her a bit of my mind one of these days. Mrs. Herbert is a dear lady; but she is not so close as her own flesh and blood"—for Collins was an old servant and privileged to speak her mind, and in the servants' hall Miss Muriel's neglect of the mistress was openly canvassed.

"I hope you will do no such thing, Collins," returned Mrs. Trevor with quiet dignity. "It is by my wish that my daughter is still at the farm; she would come to me at once if I wanted her," but Collins only pursed up her lips and shook her head incredulously. When her mistress spoke in this tone she did not dare to say any more, but she grumbled openly to the Colonel that evening.

"My mistress is getting weaker," she said dolefully, "and being so much alone is not good for her. She is not one to make a fuss about herself, and she does not tell you the half of what she goes through, but asking your pardon, sir, for speaking freely, I think Miss Muriel's place is here. There is no bringing the dead back, but as long as the living need us they have a claim to be considered."

Gavin looked a little startled; he knew that Collins was an alarmist and took dark views occasionally. He hoped her affection for her mistress had made her exaggerate matters. He got rid of her by

promising to do the best he could, and after some consideration he made up his mind to speak to Mrs. Herbert.

So the next day when he went down to the Farm and found her as usual alone, he said rather abruptly: "Mrs. Herbert, I am going to ask you to do me a favour if it will not trouble you too much; I want you to go and see my mother."

He saw her wince as though his words pained her, and there was a distressed look on her face, but he went on as though he noticed nothing.

"Collins is worrying herself about her mistress; she is a bit of an alarmist but she insists that she is weaker, and that we leave her too much alone——" But here Lorraine interrupted him:

"I see what you mean," she said with nervous haste. "I have kept Muriel too long; her mother wants her; I will tell her so to-night; she must go back of course; why did you not mention this before, Colonel Trevor? I forget things so dreadfully. Muriel has been with me for a fortnight, has she not?" putting up her hand to push back her hair as though she were suddenly oppressed.

"I think it is nearer three weeks," he returned quietly, "but we need not go back to that, it was impossible for you to be alone. I was thinking as I walked across that Nora would be a nice little companion for you if Muriel went home. Vincent would spare her, I know." But he was sorry that he had made the proposition when he saw her turn very pale.

"No, I would rather be alone. I want no one—no one"—in a choked voice. "Dear Muriel has been very good, but sometimes even she has troubled me. Oh, how selfish I have grown! I think of no one but myself!"

"Please do not say such things; and now will you let me finish? To-morrow I have to go to town about some lease that has fallen in, and I must see my lawyer. I could not get back until late, so I think it would be wise for me to sleep at my club. Muriel had better come back for that one night; but I should feel easier if you would pay my mother a visit too," and then he looked at her and said gently: "Do you think you could make the effort?"

"I ought to have made it before," she returned in a low voice. "Oh, how ashamed I am of myself, please do not say any more, Colonel Trevor. To think you should have to ask me this after all you have done for me! I will go to-morrow morning, and Muriel shall go later."

"Thank you," was all he ventured to say, but he knew that he could trust her, there would be no evading her promise; the effort, painful as it was, would do her good. But he little knew how much of Lorraine's reluctance to go to Brae lay in the thought that she would have to pass within sight of the pond.

There was another way, but it was much longer, and Lorraine knew that she was unequal to the walk; the grief that preyed on her

was sapping her strength, and Dr. Howell had hinted more than once that a change would do her good.

"Her friends must not let her get into a low moping state," he said to Muriel; "by-and-by she will need rousing, and occupation will be good for her." But Muriel felt sorrowfully that Ellison's strong will was needed; the only person who seemed to have any influence over her was Gavin; she always tried to carry out any wish that he expressed, but for some reason best known to himself he very seldom gave his opinion. Her promise to go to Brae the next morning drove all sleep from Lorraine's eyes, a nervous dread oppressed her until daylight, but jaded and weary as she was she would not allow Muriel to dissuade her. "I have promised," she said tremulously, and soon after that she set out.

She was early, and Mrs. Trevor was still in her dressing-room resting after the fatigue of her toilet. She was a little flurried when she heard Mrs. Herbert was there, but when her flush had died away Lorraine was shocked to see the change in her appearance.

Mrs. Trevor greeted her affectionately. "How good of you to come to me," she kept saying over and over again, and for a little while she would talk of nothing but Lorraine's affairs and the cross, and how pleased dear Ellison was with the idea, and how it was Gavin's thought, and how he had sat up one night until nearly three to finish his design.

"He thought nothing was good enough; but I am so glad you were pleased," and so on. Lorraine could hardly get in a word. She sat there sad and silent thinking how she was to open Muriel's eyes to her mother's state.

It was evident that Mrs. Trevor was anxious to avoid any questioning about her own health. When Lorraine told her that Muriel was coming home she argued the point almost tearfully.

"What are you to do without her, my dear?" she said sorrowfully. "Oh, yes, I know what you are going to tell me, that nothing makes a difference and you do not mind a little loneliness; but, my dear Mrs. Herbert, I have been through it all, and I know how one needs these outward helps. We do not always know what is good for us, and too much solitude seems to affect the nerves. I do not like the idea of Muriel leaving you, and you know that Collins takes good care of me, so I am not neglected. Gavin is a famous nurse too, and he is so kind and attentive. Oh, there is no need to have Muriel back at all!" But Lorraine was firm.

Mrs. Trevor could have said more, but she was far too loyal to her daughter. How was she to tell Mrs. Herbert that her girl failed to give her comfort? Muriel's heart had never opened to her freely; when they talked, some barrier of reserve seemed for ever between them.

Mrs. Trevor often read unspoken reproof in her daughter's grave eyes. Muriel, critical and dissatisfied, took umbrage at her mother's

light speeches. "Mother and I talk a different language," she had once said to Lorraine; "we look at everything in a different light; mother often calls me a pessimist because I cannot take things lightly."

Lorraine was unwilling to argue; she saw now why Colonel Trevor had asked her to come; his mother's feeble condition had made him seriously uneasy. As she rose to take her leave, some feeling of compunction made her kiss her with greater tenderness than usual.

"Forgive me for having been so selfish; I ought to have come to you before; but I shall come every day now, and Muriel will be with you. Yes, dear, you may trust me"—for the dim, tired eyes looked at her wistfully. "It is not right to hide things from our nearest and dearest. It is not fair to them. We must do unto others as we would they should do unto us. Don't you feel that, dear Mrs. Trevor." But the sick woman shook her head. A mother should be able to bear anything for her children's sake—that was her creed. Muriel had enough to bear without her mother adding to her trouble.

Her visit had roused Lorraine. When Collins, who was waiting outside the door, questioned her anxiously about her mistress's condition, she answered with something like her old manner:

"She is very ill, Collins. I think Colonel Trevor is right in asking Dr. McCallum to come down again. I am very much distressed about her. I am going back to speak very plainly to Miss Muriel. She ought not to be kept in ignorance any longer."

"You are right, ma'am," returned Collins respectfully. "That is what I have been telling my mistress; but she will not listen to me. All her life long she has considered Miss Muriel just because she had weak health; but I don't hold with such spoiling. Miss Muriel must take her share of trouble like the rest of us, and it won't help her through the dark days that are coming to think she has never done a hand's stirring for her mother's comfort," and here a tear rolled down Collins' hard-featured face.

"No indeed," returned Lorraine, in a low voice, and then she hurried away. She felt as though she would never forgive herself. Muriel had been absent from her mother for nearly three weeks, and it was plain even to her eyes that the disease was making rapid progress.

Muriel was sitting over her books as usual. She looked up when Lorraine entered.

"I did not expect you back just yet," she said, as Lorraine seated herself beside her and untied her veil. "Well, is it settled that I am to stay there to-night? I will do whatever you and mother wish; but I do hate to leave you."

"Thank you, dear; you have been so kind. But, Muriel, it is not only for this one night. I cannot let you stay here any longer. Your mother is ill, and needs you."

Muriel raised her eyebrows. "Mother ill?" she said incredulously.

"My dear Mrs. Herbert, what can you mean! Perhaps she is not as strong as usual; but ill——"

"Where are your eyes, Muriel?" returned her friend mournfully. "Is it possible that you have not noticed how painfully thin she is? No, I will not blame you. Your mother has kept you in the dark purposely. Even this morning she said to me, 'Do not tell Muriel that you think me looking ill. It will only worry her.' That is just her one thought—to keep you from worry; but, Muriel dear, it is not right. Your brother and Collins and I know that your mother is seriously ill."

A flush crossed Muriel's sallow face; her brow contracted. Lorraine's manner was making her uneasy.

"Gavin knows that mother is seriously ill, and he has not told me!" she exclaimed in a hurt voice. "Mrs. Herbert, what does it all mean? Mother has never been ill in her life; she has often said so. Surely you must be mistaken. If she were ill would not Gavin send for Dr. Howell? But I have never heard that he has been at Brae."

"That is because your mother did not wish you to be told; he has called often; and Dr. McCallum is coming too. Muriel, try to believe me—am I likely to jest with you just now? If ever your mother needed a daughter's tenderness and care, she needs it now. Her disease is a painful one, and there is no cure for it."

But it seemed as though Muriel would hear no more. She rose up hastily, pushing away her books, and walked from the room. A few minutes later she re-entered in her walking dress, looking pale and determined.

"I am going now," she said, trying to speak calmly. "You will take care of yourself, Mrs. Herbert?"

"Yes, yes"—and here she held the girl fast. "Muriel, dear, I must say something before you leave me. You are right to go; I would not keep you for worlds; you have been here far too long; but remember, she is very weak, she cannot bear much. You must be very gentle with her."

"Ah, you do well to warn me!" returned Muriel bitterly. But evidently she could not trust herself to say more. Lorraine stood by the window and waved to her sadly as she hurried down the path.

"How cruel it seems. She is not prepared for it. One can see what a blow it is for her. Poor Mrs. Trevor, and poor, poor Muriel," and then, unable to bear her sorrowful thoughts or to endure the sudden solitude of the house, she put on her hat again and went down to the yew-tree gate to sit by her darling's grave.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I HAVE NOT HAD MY SHARE OF PAIN."

A WAKEFUL night of pain had exhausted Mrs. Trevor, and soon after Lorraine had left the house she began to doze. Collins darkened the chamber carefully and then sat down to her needlework in the next room. An hour or two's sound sleep would do her mistress good, she thought, and help to shorten the long day.

Presently the sound of hasty footsteps outside made her hurry to the door, and the next moment she came face to face with Muriel.

"My mistress is asleep," she began rather crossly; but an imperious gesture from the girl silenced her.

"Come to my room a moment, if you can leave her. I want to speak to you," she said quickly, and Collins nodded and closed the door. She had never seen that look on her young lady's face before. For once Collins' garrulity failed her. She followed Muriel meekly to the turret room, and stood there a little awed and alarmed. There was something ominous in the way Muriel flung open the window and tossed off her hat. Her face looked pale and hard, and there was a sombre light in her eyes. "Collins, I want you to tell me the truth. I have been kept in the dark too long. Everyone except myself seems to know that my mother is ill. I want you to tell me exactly what is the matter with her, unless you prefer me to ask Dr. Howell."

Collins looked perturbed. The suppressed passion in Muriel's voice made her uneasy. In her heart she knew the girl was right; and yet how was she to disregard her mistress's injunctions? Her hesitation seemed to irritate Muriel.

"I do not intend to sleep to-night until I know all that there is to know. If you will not answer me, I shall order the carriage and drive to Bramfield. Dr. Howell will be on his rounds; but I shall follow him. It would save time and trouble if you would give me the information. There seems to be a conspiracy to keep me in the dark about my mother's state, and I will not bear it, no, not for an hour."

The haughty inflexion in Muriel's voice, and her restrained emotion made Collins waver.

"I would not say that if I were you, Miss Muriel," she returned plaintively. "There is no conspiracy. It is nought but kindness on the mistress's part. Mistaken kindness it may be; but there, we all make mistakes sometimes. Ever since you were a mite of a child, the mistress has always tried to keep unpleasant things from you. It was just one of her loving ways. 'We won't trouble Miss Muriel.' Ah, how often I have heard her say that, 'when things worry her,

she cannot sleep, and, poor child, she has enough to bear!' She was never like that with Miss Maud or Miss Florence. She would tell Miss Maud everything that troubled her; but she seemed to think that the wind mustn't blow on you. Times out of number have I argued with her; but I could not make an impression. 'She can do me no good, and it will only pain her to know what I suffer.' Those were her words only last night. She had a terrible night, Miss Muriel, and no one knows how thankful I was when she fell asleep towards morning. Her sufferings were cruel, and I have made up my mind to tell Dr. Howell that she had better have a nurse. He has been wanting to send one in; but we have been fending it off until now because the mistress likes me to wait on her. But I think it would be best for her comfort and my ease of mind if we had a trained nurse to help us."

"You shall have one at once, and now please answer my question," and of course Muriel had her way. Her strong will compelled Collins to tell her the truth, that her mistress was suffering from a painful and incurable malady; no one had suspected it until a few months ago, and it was only lately that the insidious disease had shown itself so plainly.

"Everything has been done that could be done, Miss Muriel; but no doctor, however clever, could cure the mistress; the Colonel knows that. She may live for a long time yet, there is no knowing in these cases. I nursed my own mother with it, so I know."

"That will do, Collins, thank you." Muriel with difficulty repressed a shudder; this was what they had been keeping from her. When Collins left the room she leant back in her chair and closed her eyes; for a moment a sort of faintness crept over her. Her strong, energetic mother with her light-hearted ways and pleasant social habits to be doomed to this. "If ever your mother needed a daughter's tenderness and care she needs it now." Lorraine's words seemed ringing in her ears.

She had been a bad daughter—at least a careless, selfish one—but it would not do to think of that now. She rose hastily, drank some cold water and bathed her face; then she stole down to her mother's dressing-room so softly that Collins did not hear her.

Mrs. Trevor was still asleep, and Muriel took a seat noiselessly beside the couch.

Even in the half light, through the shaded Venetians, she could see her mother's face distinctly, and the change in it made her heart stand still for a moment: the deep hollows in the temple and the dark shadows under the eyes, the exhaustion of her attitude and a certain wasting of the figure gave her a shock; but as she bent over her in undisguised anxiety Mrs. Trevor opened her eyes, she was still confused with sleep.

"Is that you, Maud darling?" she said feebly.

"No, mother, it is Muriel," and then all at once her proud stoicism

deserted her, and she broke into a sudden storm of sobs. "Oh, mother, why have you been so cruel? but I suppose I have deserved it. I have not been good to you, not like Maud and Florrie, and so you have kept your illness from me, but it makes it doubly hard to bear."

Mrs. Trevor was fully awake now; she stretched out her thin hands appealingly to her daughter.

"Have I been cruel, darling? I did not mean it, I was only so anxious to save you pain; don't cry so, my poor child, come nearer to me, how am I to comfort you there?" Mrs. Trevor's voice had a caressing note in it, and Muriel, humbled and wretched, knelt down by the couch and laid her head in her mother's lap.

"Oh, mother, it does seem so dreadful!" she sobbed, and the hand that was stroking her hair shook a little.

"Does it, darling. Well, I have not had my share of pain, you must remember that. When your father and the dear girls were alive, I think no woman was ever so happy, every day that I lived was a joy and a feast to me; I used to tell your father so, and it often made him smile. I used to wish you could feel the same, dearest, but your weak health seemed to deprive you of all enjoyment, that is why I never liked to trouble you about things."

"Yes, I know, Collins has told me. It was a sad mistake, mother; you have fostered my selfishness; how could I guess that anything ailed you when you have never complained. As a daughter I have been valueless to you; Ellison and Mrs. Herbert were more to you than I; even Collins, a servant, was in your confidence," and here Muriel, overcome with emotion, shed some more bitter tears.

Mrs. Trevor sighed, she was beginning to think she had made a mistake; she had not suspected Muriel of such deep feeling, the girl had always been so reserved with her.

"I am afraid I have done wrong," she returned remorsefully; "I ought not to have kept it all to myself. Don't cry, Muriel dear, try to forgive me. I did it for the best. Where my children are concerned I am very weak, I want to take their share of pain and my own too. Oh, there comes Collins to scold us! Collins, Miss Muriel is hurt with us, she thinks we have not treated her well."

"Miss Muriel is about right there," returned Collins a little gruffly, "but least said is soonest mended, and it is no use nursing a grudge when one has done it for the best. Miss Muriel, my mistress must not talk too much; she has had a fine nap, and I am going to bring up her tea. Dr. Howell will be here presently, and she must not be too tired beforehand."

"I will be as quiet as a mouse, but there is no need for Miss Muriel to leave me; my tea will have a better flavour if she will make it for me." Mrs. Trevor spoke with her old playfulness, but when Collins had retired she looked at her daughter fondly.

"I shall love to have you with me, Muriel dear; it has been so

dull alone ! I think solitude makes me fanciful. Gavin has been very good ; he has often given up his evening to me ; but somehow I have always missed you. If it will not tire you too much, I shall be so glad of your company !” But Muriel dared not trust herself to speak. She kissed her mother’s cheek hastily, and rose to her feet. Her heart was full. A passion of tenderness seemed to swell it almost to bursting. If she might only have time to atone for her past neglect, she would be ready to bear everything. “God grant that she may be spared to me a little longer !” was her inward cry.

There was very little more talk between them that night. Dr. Howell came, and, seeing his patient’s exhaustion, ordered her to bed without delay, and it was decided between him and Muriel that a nurse should be sent in as soon as possible.

“Collins is a very reliable person, and knows a good deal about illness,” he observed ; “but Mrs. Trevor’s condition will require trained nursing. I told the Colonel so when I was last here. You will be able to be with her as much as you wish ; but we must consider what is best for her comfort. Nurse Helena will be invaluable. She has been nursing a case for me, and will be free to-morrow.”

When Lorraine came up the next day, she found Mrs. Trevor still in bed, and Muriel sitting beside her. Directly she had greeted her friend, Muriel laid down her book and left the room, and did not re-enter it. When Lorraine’s visit was over, she went in search of her, and found her sitting in the turret room, looking dejectedly at the prospect. Admiral Byng was rubbing himself against her to attract her attention.

Lorraine put her hand on her shoulder affectionately.

“Dear Muriel, I missed you so last night and this morning ! The house felt so lonely without you ; but you are in your right place. Mrs. Trevor is so happy to have you, and I know how you must love to be here ! Your brother is not back yet, she says.”

“No, Gavin is not back ; he will come by his usual train, I expect. Mrs. Herbert, I want to tell you something. I know everything now. I made Collins tell me. I was angry, and frightened her, and in the evening I spoke to Dr. Howell.”

“That is why you have not slept. You are looking quite ill this morning ! Poor Muriel, you have sad work before you ; but you must take each day as it comes. Sleepless nights and fretting over things will do no good, and will only trouble Mrs. Trevor. She is so afraid of your breaking down !”

“I shall not break down—at least, I hope not ; but how can I sleep with this dreadful thing hanging over me ? I never knew how dear my mother was till I heard there was danger of losing her. Oh, if I had only known it before ! If I had not neglected her so cruelly ! How am I ever to be happy again ? All last night such terrible thoughts seemed crowding upon me ! All my hasty, hard speeches,

and impatient ways, and how gently she bore with them all! I thought she was so strong and light-hearted; but I know now that she was often dull and out of spirits. Collins came up and talked to me last night. How I wished she had held her tongue! All she said only made it worse. How could I know she missed the girls so dreadfully, and that she was always talking about them! They were dear girls; but they were never much to me. They were always together, and I was left out in the cold. It has always been like that all my life. No one has seemed to need me—not even my mother.”

“She needs you now. Dear Muriel, do let me entreat you not to undermine your own strength by dwelling on past mistakes. You have your mother still with you. She has not been taken from you without a moment's preparation. There is still time to love and cherish her.” Lorraine's voice broke, and she turned hastily away, and Muriel felt a little remorseful.

When she re-entered her mother's room, Mrs. Trevor looked at her wistfully. “Muriel, love, why did you leave us? There was no need. Mrs. Herbert and I have no secrets. I like to feel you are near me. I never want you to go away—it is so nice not to be alone any more!”

How often Muriel had to listen to such speeches! Even her mother's tenderness seemed insensibly to reproach her. Day after day as she sat by her, sometimes talking or more often silent, she learnt more and more of her mother's patience and brave endurance. How Gavin and she had misjudged her! They had thought her sprightliness and cheerfulness were owing to a shallow nature—that she took her troubles lightly; but they had been wrong. Evening after evening she listened with dismayed pity to the history of sleepless nights spent in weeping for the husband she had idolized and the children who were so dear to her.

“It was my duty to be cheerful, and not to depress you,” she would say; “but it was very hard sometimes. When I woke in the morning I would say to myself, ‘It is all in the day's work,’ and then I would pull myself together and pretend a little, and after a time it grew easier. Don't you know what Shakespeare says, Muriel, ‘Time and the hour run through the roughest day.’ I used to say that to myself over and over again.”

It was a sad and trying ordeal for Muriel; but years afterwards she owned to a dear friend that it had been salutary discipline.

“I needed my lesson,” she said humbly. “All my life I had lived for myself, and my mother's mistaken indulgence had only fostered my selfishness. Mrs. Herbert had been the first to warn me against morbid introspection; but it needed the furnace of affliction to burn up the evil growth of years. For the first time in my life I forgot my own troubles. Oh, if you knew the agony of loving too late! The thought of those wasted years, when I might have

cherished and comforted the best of mothers, will give me pain until my dying day."

With the unerring instinct of love, Mrs. Trevor once touched on this. "Muriel," she said one day, when she had been comparatively free from pain, and Muriel had been reading to her, "put down your book; your voice sounds tired, and I want to talk a little. You are spoiling the old mother dreadfully—you and Gavin. I think sometimes as I lie awake at night that no woman had two better children."

"I dare say you are right with respect to Gavin, mother." The sad note of pain in the girl's voice went to her mother's heart. She turned a little, and looked at her with her old beaming smile.

"Yes, I have a good son, God bless him! And I have a dear and good daughter too. Don't draw your hand away, Muriel darling. We are not often alone together like this, and I want to tell you what a comfort you are to me! When I see your sisters—they will be so glad when I tell them that—oh, how much I shall have to tell them! I dream about it sometimes. Nurse says it is because I am so weak; but I think such dreams are sent in mercy."

"I think so too, mother." And Mrs. Trevor smiled and went on:

"Only last night I thought I was in some green valley. I was alone; but I could hear such beautiful singing! And presently I saw them—the girls, I mean—coming across the flowery turf. They were hand in hand, and their dresses were white, and they had wonderful red flowers in their hands.

"'Here is mother at last!'—I heard Maud say that quite plainly, and Florrie clapped her hands in the old way. 'Poor dear mother—how old and tired she looks! But the good angels will take care of her!'—and then I woke. Was not that a beautiful dream?"

"Yes, dear, and no doubt it was sent to comfort you; but, mother, I am so selfish. I want to keep you with me a little longer. I cannot spare you to Maud and Florence just yet."

Mrs. Trevor looked at her wistfully.

"Thank you, darling. It is nice to hear that; but when the Master calls, we are bound to go. Muriel, I want you to thank Mr. Vincent; he has been such a comfort to me all these weeks!"

"He has been a comfort to us all," was on Muriel's lips; but some feeling restrained her from saying this. Eric had been unwearied in his attentions; he came up to Brae daily.

"He is an excellent young man," returned Mrs. Trevor, and then she looked at her daughter a little thoughtfully. A mother's eyes are clairvoyant, and on her sick-bed she had learnt to read her daughter's heart perfectly. "He is the only man who would ever suit her," she thought sadly. "The love of a man like Mr. Vincent would make her a happy woman; but I am afraid he cares more for Mrs. Herbert. There is a warm friendship between him and Muriel; but—but it is only friendship," and then she sighed. Those clear,

bright eyes of hers had read Eric Vincent's nature correctly. She knew how his strong, cultured, unselfish character, trained by adversity, was just what Muriel's fastidious, morbid nature needed to ripen and bring it to perfection.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GAVIN'S DECISION.

It was well for Eric Vincent that parish work just then engrossed him and prevented him from dwelling on his private troubles. His daily ministrations in the sick-room at Brae, and his long talks with his friend Colonel Trevor and with Muriel consoled him in part for the total cessation of his visits to the Farm.

Except in the village or at church he never saw Mrs. Herbert. The little he heard of her was from Muriel. She told him once that Mrs. Herbert was trying to take up her old duties again; that she looked after the sick people at Highlands; but that if any child was ill, she always sent Ruth in her place.

"She cannot bring herself to be with children," Muriel added sorrowfully; but he knew this already. Nora never dared take Effie or Eddie to the Farm now. She always seemed so unnerved at the sight of them. She had expressed her thankfulness openly to Muriel when she heard Hugo had been sent to school.

"He has followed me like a shadow," she said, brushing away a few tears. "I could not go to the churchyard or the village without finding him watching for me. I used to bite my lips and clench my hands sometimes to prevent my saying something unkind to him; but I am thankful I never said it. It got on my nerves at last, poor boy. It is not that I have not forgiven him; but that it brings it all back, and I am not strong enough to bear it." Nevertheless Lorraine schooled herself to write a kind letter to the little exile. Hugo burst out crying as he read it. For months it was under his pillow at night. When he had a bad dream he would take it out and cuddle it. "She says I am to be a good boy, and that I must grow up a noble man," he wrote once to his sole confidante Nora; "that she trusts me, and knows I shall never disappoint her; and I never will. I wish you would tell Eric this, and then perhaps he will believe in me too."

Eric felt his banishment from the Farm acutely; but he could not bring himself to go without an invitation; but Lorraine, lonely and sad as she was, seemed to dread visitors above all things.

Colonel Trevor once remonstrated with her. He thought all these weeks of solitude would tell on her.

"Our kind neighbours feel that you are keeping them at a distance," he said to her one day, when he walked back with her from Brae. Since his sister had left he very seldom went to the Farm; but he always walked back with her, taking care to put himself between her and the pond. He knew instinctively the daily torture it gave her to pass it. "Mrs. Earnshaw told my mother yesterday that she feared her visit had troubled you."

"Oh, no, she was so kind to me, every one is kinder to me than I deserve; but if you knew how it tires me to talk to people; I never seem to have anything to say now; I have grown so stupid, sometimes I break off in a sentence and forget what I was going to say, and then I see people look at me, and there is silence, and then they go away."

"Yes, I see what you mean, I have gone through all that; but, Mrs. Herbert, if you will take my advice you will just battle with the feeling, it is no use giving way, it only makes it worse. I am stating my opinion rather bluntly, but I am speaking for your own good."

"Yes, and you are never blunt," and then Lorraine turned to him with a faint smile. There was a lovely dimple that he had often admired; for one second he saw it again, but her eyes were very sad.

"I wonder if you do understand," she went on slowly; "men are so different, their life is so much more active than ours; they do not get drowsy and stupid sitting at home brooding over troubles. When people come to me from the outside they seem to talk a different language. Sometimes I have an odd fancy as though I were at one end of a dark tunnel and they at the other end somewhere in the sunshine; I can hear what they say, but somehow the meaning is confused. Oh, it is so difficult to make anyone understand who has not been through it!"

"But I have been through it, as you know well," he returned gravely, "that is why I cannot fail to understand you," but he was sorry he said this when she turned to him impulsively with her eyes misty with unshed tears.

"I was very thoughtless to say that; you have suffered so much and you are always trying to help me. Colonel Trevor, I will be good, I will try to bear with people and not feel too impatient for them to go away. I know I have been selfish, I have wanted no one but you and Muriel—there, I have confessed my fault, and you must forgive me."

She was evidently in earnest, for there was a sort of yearning in her deep low voice, but he answered her lightly.

He dared not let her see how her words had alarmed him; was he becoming at all necessary to her? And then he scoffed at himself for entertaining such an idea for a moment. Her very openness and simplicity disarmed his suspicions. Of course she was glad to see him, he had been with her in her trouble, and she had learnt to depend on him. "I have been of use to her, and she is grateful," he said to himself, but nevertheless some doubt rankled in his mind;

and that night he took his resolution. A few days later Ellison, sitting on her balcony overlooking the village street, received the following letter, which she read and re-read many times that night.

"My dear Ellison," it began, "there are limits to everything, and it seems to me that the time has come to break this long silence that has somehow grown up between us—not by my will; you know that, dear; it was your own act—your own expressed wish that you should be left in peace; but now we have come to the end of the tether, and you will not be surprised if I tell you that my patience is at an end too.

"How long are you going to be away? You left us in July and now it is October. I know how impossible it has been for you to leave your sick friend; but in your last letter to my mother you were in hopes you would soon have your marching orders.

"Dear Ellison, when they come, I entreat you not to lose a day—no, not an hour—in unnecessary preparation. I have no wish to alarm you, but our dear mother grows weaker every day. You know how patient she is, but I can see how she longs for your return; you have been like a daughter to her all these years, and she feels your absence a sore trial. 'Is there no letter from Ellison?' those are always her first words in the morning. What sad changes there have been in our happy valley, as you always call it; first poor Mrs. Herbert's trouble, and now the poor old vicar is gone. Vincent had a letter this morning, and came up to me at once. Muriel is writing full particulars to you. It was another stroke; Mrs. Yolland had only left him for ten minutes, but when she returned to the room he was speechless. It is a great grief to Muriel, and she was terribly upset when Vincent was here. I had to explain to him that Mr. Yolland had been her tutor, and that he and his good wife had always made so much of her. The churchwardens are writing to Sir Percy; they want me to write too and speak for Vincent; he seems a general favourite here, and the people are becoming attached to him. If Sir Percy has no one else in his mind he may offer him the living. Will you let me know how this strikes you; in my opinion he is just the man for Highlands. Our old vicar was the better scholar, but Vincent has greater energy; he gets hold of the men at the club, and there is less lounging at the *Waggon and Horses* on Saturday evenings.

"Vincent being at the vicarage will make a great difference in my life. I have got into the habit of seeing him nearly every day, and we are quite chums. Muriel and I are all very grateful to him for his ministrations to our mother; she often tells us that he is the greatest comfort to her, and that she forgets that he is so young; he seems older, somehow, and graver, even to me. That terrible accident has sobered him, he has taken it so much to heart.

"I fear that you will find Mrs. Herbert greatly changed; I want to prepare you for that. She is very sad and drooping, and we find it

difficult to rouse her ; she does her duties in a half-hearted perfunctory way, but for the present the old spring and energy have gone ; my mother says we must give her time, but it seems to me as though she will never be like her old self again.

"I am writing to you in my old fashion—just everything that comes into my head—the old ways are the best and sweetest ! But I am keeping the real purpose of my letter to the last.

"Ellison, do you remember our last walk, and what I tried to say to you at the gate of the Woodlands ? My heart was very full that evening—full of unspoken love and tenderness—but you forced me to keep silence.

"Dear, have you found out your mistake by this time—for it was a mistake, was it not ?—it would have been better and happier for us both if you had allowed me to finish my sentence. I want you to own this frankly. It was my intention that evening to ask you to become my wife—our long friendship, my warm attachment, gave me a right to hope for a favourable answer ; but when I found you were not ready to listen to me—that it troubled you to give up your cherished independence—I did not press my own wishes. I think you will own that I have been more patient than most men. But, as I said before, there are limits to everything—and even to this long letter—and I have made up my mind not to wait for your return, but to ask you to pledge yourself to me without any further delay. When we meet, let it be on a different footing. In one sense we have been much to each other, but now the tie must be closer. I would fain believe that this absence has worked in my favour, and that you are ready now to be engaged to me. I know you will be perfectly frank with me—indeed, I deserve such frankness ! Let us thoroughly understand each other from this day forward. God bless you !

"Yours,

"GAVIN."

This was the letter that cost Gavin a sleepless night to write. There were sentences that he re-wrote again and again ; but he could not satisfy himself. He told himself that it was cold, unloverlike, and that it was not worthy of the dear woman whom he was asking to become his wife ; but how was he to help himself ?

Gavin's direct, straightforward nature hated shams ; he would give Ellison all he could—his reverence, his honest affection, and that worship that a good man gives to the woman he honours ; but he could not call her his dearest !—not yet, at least !

But to Ellison that letter was simply perfect ; from beginning to end there was no single flaw in it.

At first she believed it was just an ordinary letter like the others she had received from him. He had always written to her when he had been away—long chatty letters that had given him pleasure to write, and which she had loved to receive. Were they not faithful

and trusty comrades, and was he not right in saying the old ways were the best and sweetest? "Dear Gavin—how true he is!" she said softly, when she came to this.

But the next sentence made her heart beat more quickly, and she grew pale with sudden strong emotion. She put down the letter a moment, for the mist before her eyes seemed to blur the words. Then she took it up again and read steadily to the end.

Could any lover have written more nobly? Every word was Gavin-like—it brought him before her. How she gloried in his simple, manly directness!

"I think you will own that I have been more patient than most men."—"My dearest, no one has ever been more patient," she murmured, when she came to this.

"I know you will be perfectly frank with me—indeed, I deserve such frankness."—"And you shall have it, my own," she said softly, and she pressed the paper to her lips.

Ellison soon wrote her answer; but it was very short, and to the point.

"Dear Gavin," she wrote, "you have asked me to be frank with you. You are right. Such frankness is indeed your due, and I will own to you that I made a great mistake in refusing to listen to you that evening. You have been very patient with me, my dearest"—there was some attempt to erase the "dearest," but it had not been successful—"and I behaved most foolishly. What is independence, after all, compared to the joy of being beloved? A woman has no right to let her pride and self-will stand in the way of her happiness—your noble forbearance has taught me this lesson. Dear Gavin, I will not hesitate any longer. I am perfectly willing to be engaged to you; for years your wishes have been mine. I need say no more. You have conquered—your very patience has won me. How sad everything is! Our dear old vicar—but I cannot write about that to-night—and poor suffering cousin Louise! You will have need of all the comfort I can give you, my poor Gavin—for there are dark days in store for you. What you tell me about Lorraine is very sad. But she is so unselfish; she will not long suffer herself to droop hopelessly. I have confidence in her strength of mind. And now, dear Gavin, you will rejoice to hear that we have got our marching orders—Margaret is so much better that Dr. Strauss thinks we may safely move her. We shall travel by easy stages, and if all goes well, I shall hope to reach London by the 20th. I must sleep in Portman Square that night, but Margaret's cousin, Mrs. Garcia, will be there, so there will be no need for me to stay longer.

"I have not dared tell you how home-sick I have been. I know now what exiles feel. Since Sister Rosalie came I have had too much time on my hands. I am afraid you will grumble at my looks, but these weeks of nursing would have tried the strongest woman.

"I am writing this hastily, but I do not want to lose a single post.

"Yours entirely and always,

"ELLISON."

When Gavin read this letter he sat for a long time motionless in his chair. He had burnt his boats—from henceforth no retreat was possible. His word, his honour were pledged, and from that moment he must bring himself to look on Ellison as his future wife.

If this thought brought him no joy, it was not his fault, or hers either. "A man must do his duty under all circumstances," he said to himself stoically; "and no difficulty, no sense of hardship in performing it should deter him. The paths of pleasantness and peace are not for me," he said half aloud, and then for a few moments Gavin's soul was wrapt in bitterness.

He had hastened on his own doom, and had in a sense forged his own fetters; but no one but he himself knew that his sole safety lay in doing so. Every day his position had become more perilous and fraught with danger, as every day Lorraine became dearer to him. His very manhood tempted him; he could not see her in her loneliness and helplessness without longing to shelter and protect her. "No one understands her as I do," he would say to himself, and there were times when he could even read her thoughts.

But it was not his own fear of self-betrayal that alone determined him to take instant action—it was some subtle undefinable change in Lorraine that roused him, and yet it was nothing tangible: a consciousness at moments of unexpected meetings that a faint colour would steal into her wan face—that those sweet pensive smiles, more sad than any tears, were for him alone—signs which first made his heart beat almost to suffocation, and then filled him with alarm; and yet such was his reverence for her that he never once asked himself how he stood with her.

"She is beginning to depend on me too much,"—that was all he would allow. "In her peculiar circumstances one is bound to protect her. Vincent stays away altogether, but with me—that is hardly possible. Ellison has entrusted me with her affairs, and I cannot shirk my duties." Nevertheless, by degrees he had broken off his visits, and though he and Lorraine met nearly every day, their interviews were brief, and Muriel was generally with them. But Ellison was coming, and things would be placed on a right footing. Their engagement would be made public—he would take care of that.

Lorraine had been right when she said only a woman can endure to sit at home brooding over troubles. Gavin's restlessness demanded the relief of action.

Only his mother's precarious and declining state prevented him from rushing off the next day to offer his escort to Ellison; it would have done him a world of good to shake off the air of Highlands for a little, but, as he phrased it a little bitterly, he was chained to the

galley oar of duty. No, this relief had been denied him; but, at least, there was one thing that he could do; and then he got up quickly and went to his mother's room. Mrs. Trevor never left her bed now. She was lying propped up with pillows; she looked at her son with her usual loving smile as he sat down beside her, but the next moment her expression changed.

"You have something to tell me, Gavin—I can see it in your eyes. I read people's faces so quickly. Nurse is in the dressing-room,"—as he looked inquiringly towards the half-open door—"but she will not hear us. It is about Ellison—she is coming home."

"Yes, she is coming home, the day after to-morrow they are to begin their return journey; but Miss Mervyn can only travel by easy stages, so they do not expect to reach London until the 20th. I am glad my news pleases you, mother; but that is not all I have to tell you"—and as her eyes fastened anxiously on his face, he said slowly, "Ellison and I are engaged."

A low sob broke from Mrs. Trevor's lips, and as he sat on the bed beside her, she suddenly flung her feeble arms round him. "Gavin, my own dear son! Thank God for this!" she exclaimed. "My prayer has indeed been answered. Oh, it has been so long coming, I began to think you would never make up your mind to marry—that I must give up all thoughts of dear Ellison coming here in my place. But I was too impatient. My dearest boy, you have made me so happy."

He bent his head and kissed her. "I knew it would give you pleasure. Ellison has always been like a daughter to you. Mother, it is not my fault that we have not been engaged three months ago; but Ellison could not make up her mind."

"Did you ask her that evening when she and Mrs. Herbert dined here? Never mind"—as his face clouded a little at the remembrance. "I will not weary you about details; you shall only tell me what you like. Does Muriel know?"

"Not yet; I have come to you first. I think, under the circumstances, no one but you and Muriel must know. It would not be well to publish things during Ellison's absence; it might embarrass her. We must get used to our position before we take our friends into confidence; but you and Muriel can write to her or send messages."

"Very well, dear. Of course, dear Ellison will be a little shy at first, and she would like a few days' quiet."

Mrs. Trevor talked on happily. If Gavin were a little grave, a little wanting in lover-like enthusiasm, his mother thought such gravity was only becoming under the circumstances. "He is no love-sick boy; one must not expect him to indulge in raptures," she said to herself. "That is why Ellison will suit him perfectly." And when Muriel came to her later on that night, a little excited with the news, she gave vent to her joy without restraint.

"Muriel, darling," she said, impulsively, "it seems almost too good to be true. I could not help worrying a little about Gavin; but now Ellison will make him happy, and they will both take such care of you. You will not leave them, will you, dearest—it would be so dull for you living alone at the Dower House?"

But Muriel refused to give any opinion on this point. "Mother, dear," she said imploringly, "I have begged you so often not to trouble about the future; there is no use making up one's mind beforehand. When the time comes I shall know what to do;" and as her mother continued to look wistfully at her, she went on hurriedly, "Gavin and Ellison will help me to decide things," and then Mrs. Trevor was satisfied.

"I can say my 'Nunc Dimittis' now," she said to herself that night; and the next day she pencilled a loving little note to Ellison, which reached her in due course.

(To be continued.)

ENGLISH RISPETTI.

LILY OF THE VALLEY.

I.

Sweet bells, sweet fairy bells, that ring
The maiden's joy and bridal promise sweet,
With orange-blossoms wed, that whispering
Of partnered fitness ever fair and meet,
Would fain the grace of all the world uplift
Into one tender, solemn, precious gift—
The star of purity that tells of home,
From which assorted hearts no more can roam.

II.

With larger lilies, white and fair as snow,
Upon dead breasts ye lie of those who young
Have passed to peace, unpartnered in the glow
Of bliss, which poets of all times have sung:
A promise of a marriage yet more rare,
And sweet and mystic, in which all of fair
In human life has seal, the bridegroom He
Within Whose arms we all at rest may be.

THE GENTLEMAN'S BEAUTY.

BY ELEANOR F. COBBY.

AUTHOR OF "REMARKABLE SAYINGS OF REMARKABLE QUEENS,"
"ANNE BOLEYN'S DECISION," ETC., ETC.

THE phrase "Gentleman's Beauty" is hard to define. But though the origin of the subtle attraction this kind of woman possesses may be somewhat obscure, its effects are clear as daylight. The world knows well when the gentleman's beauty is abroad. The features of Cleopatra were not perhaps perfect, but Fulvia felt the fearful power of the rival at whom she vainly railed, and so did the sweeter Octavia.

There rise to our recollection as we write four ladies moving in the ordinary circles of life who were specimens of different styles of the same attractive quality. The first was tall, superbly formed with alluring eyes and a manner so seductive that its charm was felt even by members of her own sex when she condescended to practice upon them. But she did not waste her candles on this unamusing game. In a general way she aroused terror in the hearts of her sisters, for they watched their dearest hover round her like moths around the flame that scorches and maims if it does not kill outright. They watched her—these mothers, wives, sisters, aye even daughters, since no man was too old, as well as none too young for her to befool; and powerless to prevent the fascination, they simply felt that they loathed the fascination. Providentially her sphere was small. She could not for want of space work the same havoc in the world as the Montespons, Fompadours, and Portsmouths have done; but her inclinations turned in that direction. Probably she felt grateful when death drew near that her opportunities for evil had been limited, for she died repentant.

The second gentleman's beauty was so quiet in manner, so gentle in spirit, so delicate in feature, such a strong contrast to the first-mentioned type, that we should not have supposed she would have done the business for the men at all if facts were not stubborn things, and—metaphorically—she slew her thousands. She had a classic face a calm, smooth brow, a pensive expression in her almond-shaped,

brown eyes, and she seemed to have learned the art of conversation only to sit gracefully silent while the world clamoured around her.

The third was rather tall with a somewhat voluptuous figure. The whiteness of her arms and neck was warmed by the faintest tone of underlying pink, her hair was golden-brown, and her eyes, not large, but sweet, were of the same hue. Her features were by no means small, her forehead was broad, her cheeks were mottled by the red and white rose, and one had a dimple, her curved full mouth had a slow, gracious smile, and her voice, low and tuneful, had a charming accent. She had perfect manners and seemed born for admiration; but though married in her first youth to a man many years older than herself, and this by the arrangement of friends, she took at once to the duties of her position, and faced like a noble matron the adulation of the idle and flattering who wanted to flirt with her. She was a gentleman's beauty, but had no inclination to act up to her privileges as such. She preferred to be known as an excellent mother—an incomparable wife.

The fourth lady we shall mention was one who appeared, at the first glance, to have no pretensions to be placed in the class we are describing at all; but a little observation of the sentiments she aroused would have corrected the mistake. She attracted wherever she went, though her features were pinched, her manners old-maidish, her skin sallow, and her blue eyes cold and passionless. The only explanation of the charm that gentlemen undoubtedly found in her lay in the fact that she had a very sweet smile that seldom came, but when it did flashed over her face like a sunbeam. It showed her white teeth—the only beauty she possessed—and so altered the demure expression of her features, that it produced a sensation of novel pleasure in the persons who saw it come and go—the change was so great and rapid. It piqued the curiosity of her admirers.

And we remember yet another lady who was charged to the fingertips with that mysterious power that attracts to itself the attentions of men. She was rather tall and so large that it is no injustice to call her fat; she had a round, flat face, hair of a reddish hue, and no beauty whatever in her features. But her manners were soft and appealing, her low voice had almost a weeping tone in it as if she would say: "I am helpless, timid, tender-hearted. Be good to me, I need your kindness, friendship, affection." And those touching accents were not heard in vain. The gentlemen flocked round her deserting the side of far handsomer women to do so, while these ladies regarded the plain and plump enchantress with resentful astonishment.

In fact the type varies so much that the only certain thing about the gentleman's beauty is, that the ordinary "pretty girl," with her pink-and-white complexion, seldom, if ever, comes into the category. Of course she gets lovers, partners at balls, attention at picnics and tennis parties, and most frequently a husband in the end; but her charms as a rule fade with her youth, for she has not that ingrained

attractiveness which the subject of this paper possesses and which endures till late in life.

Too great a regularity of feature, and features too small would seem to be unfavourable for becoming a gentleman's beauty unless the uniformity is relieved by expressive eyes or a gracious mouth with free curves.

The siren of whom we treat has been only too frequent in courts, and is by no means rare in the list of Queens, and *then* tears and blood have bathed her path. It goes without telling that Helen was a gentleman's beauty, and so was Anne Boleyn, and so was Anne of Austria, and so were many other Royal ladies; but beyond all these, and even beyond Cleopatra, when we speak of a lovely queen our thoughts go straight to the unhappy Mary of Scotland.

The mention of this ill-starred name brings us to a curious point in our discussion, the fact that not only the common-place "pretty girl," but also the regularly beautiful woman, perfect in feature, form, and style, may be destitute of that magnetic attraction which distinguishes the gentleman's beauty. Two Queens bearing the same name and belonging to the same unfortunate dynasty, illustrate this. There was another and a younger Mary Stuart for whom men did *not* dare and die, and yet any unprejudiced person who gazes at the portrait of the Queen of Scots and then at that of Mary II. when young, must admit that the latter had the advantage in mere physical good looks. But she had not the fascination which made the face of the other Mary fatal to so many who beheld it. She did not pose as a gentleman's beauty. King William III. was a faithless husband and not too kind, and we do not hear that the courtiers fell hopelessly in love with her. But on the other hand she had no bitter personal enemies to thirst for her blood and track her to a scaffold as they tracked the Scottish Queen to the black-draped hall at Fotheringay.

Of all positions in which a gentleman's beauty with vicious propensities can do mischief to herself and others there is nothing to equal a throne. How many bloody battle-fields, how many wasted lands, and how many broken hearts can be traced to the influence of a beautiful Queen or of one who had a pretty trick with her eyes. But injury done to other people has a very old habit of stealing back to one's own hearth when the night falls, and Royal ladies, whose charms have set men on to desperate deeds, have themselves sometimes come to sorrows that seem worse than death.

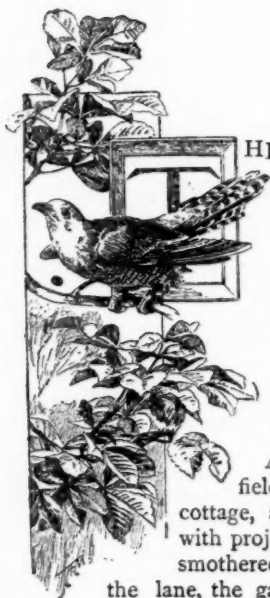
Even Helen—that arch-disturber of Grecian society—though she got on better than she deserved, must have had a very bad quarter-of-an-hour when she first met "the vengeful Spartan" after an absence of ten years. And though he took her back it is too much to suppose that he did not sometimes allude to Troy when tired and out of sorts; for even British husbands can say unpleasant things when the chimney smokes or business goes wrong without the awful provocation Menelaus had.

And Cleopatra, though she beguiled for a time the greatest captain the world has seen, and spoiled for ever the career of his clever lieutenant Mark Antony, came at last to the end of her tether. When she found that she could not befooled the cold, inflexible Octavius, she gave way to spite and despair, and sent for that historic asp. The heroine of Troy is somewhat of a myth to us; but we seem to know the swarthy Queen of Egypt quite well, almost as if we had felt her full strong pulse, and met her sensuous smile.

Anne Boleyn was a gentleman's beauty, and she ruled for years the strongest King that ever reigned in England; but her influence ceased at length, and just as she supplanted his first and noble wife, so was she supplanted by a maid of honour, and her beautiful head rolled on a scaffold. Her rival, Jane Seymour, was also a gentleman's beauty; but she was far too wary a woman to let the gentlemen admire her.

A very fascinating queen, and one that was willing to receive the admiration she excited, was Anne of Austria, the unloved wife of Louis XIII. of France. She had an exquisite complexion, and wonderful eyes, was young and volatile as well as fair, and being tired of France, and neglected by her husband, she looked round her for amusement, and hit upon a dangerous pastime. Her singular beauty had wrought a mad passion in what Cardinal Richelieu was pleased to call his heart, and he had the audacity to tell his sovereign's wife that he adored her, and she, instead of repulsing him with queenly scorn, could think of nothing wiser to do than to get him to dance a saraband in her private apartment, and then scream with laughter in which her concealed confidante rejoined. The ridiculed Cardinal vowed vengeance against the giggling pair, and kept his stern oath so well that for many a bitter year they rued their evening's fun. The last glimpse we get of this queen is in strong contrast to the frivolity of her girlhood. We pass over the love-pranks of Buckingham, the stormy days of her regency, her strange infatuation for Mazarin, and look in upon her an elderly princess whose frame is wasting under a painful disease, and at whose elbow death is waiting. She is again neglected by a king of France; but this time it is her son who leaves his dying mother to her own devices; and she sits night after night in the sad companionship of another neglected queen—the young, little-loved wife of Louis XIV., also a Spaniard; and the two forlorn women converse fondly together about the sunny land from which both came, until the older of the two—she who was once the gay and captivating Anne of Austria—sinks thankfully into the grave, and her sorrowing daughter-in-law continues those doleful evenings alone.

The gentleman's beauty is not always to be envied: her sun is apt to set in stormy clouds.



P H C E B E .

I.

HE lane led to nowhere at all. There was a fenced-in field at the end, which belonged to Squire Kingston, and Kingston Hall stood about half-way down on the right-hand side as you turned into the lane from the high road. There were no houses on the left, only an avenue of lime-trees, and beyond that, a plantation through which, by a circuitous path, the village might be reached. Another path led straight into the pine woods, for which the place was justly famous.

And midway between Kingston Hall and the field at the end of the lane was a large gabled cottage, all covered with ivy and Virginian creeper, with projecting bay windows, and a roomy old porch, smothered in honeysuckle. It stood well back from the lane, the garden being enclosed by a high box hedge which, on one side, alone separated it from the grounds of Kingston Hall. Lime Cottage had once been an appurtenance of the Hall; but it now belonged to a former agent of the estate, a lawyer named Morel, who lived there with his grand-daughter—an old housekeeper and one other servant comprising the small household.

One sultry evening towards the close of August, when the scent of new-mown hay came wafted across from the field, and there were still some roses left in the garden, Mr. Morel was sitting on a bench, just outside the porch, smoking his favourite long pipe. There was a puzzled expression on his kind, rugged face as he stared fixedly at a plot of grass, close to the hedge on his left.

Presently he laid aside his pipe, and taking up a stout walking-stick pointed it towards the hedge and began counting.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—only seven! I'd swear there were eight a minute ago, and there were nine to start with; there *ought* to be nine."

He began again.

"One, two, three, four, five, six—only six now. Bless my soul!"

He took the silk handkerchief from over his knees, and carefully wiped his eyes. Then he began again. This time he only got as far as five, and he swore quietly but emphatically.

"Well," he muttered, mopping his forehead, "if this doesn't beat everything! I've heard of folks seeing double, but not——"

A pair of soft hands were laid on his eyes and a gay young voice cried—"Why, grandfather, who are you grumbling at?"

"Phœbe, my dear, just look at that grass-plot yonder."

The girl shaded her eyes with her hand and stared in the direction indicated. Then she gave a little cry.

"Oh, those chickens! If they haven't escaped again! I'll soon catch them," she added, speaking close to his ear.

The old man chuckled. "Unless you're sharp there will not be any to catch," he called after her as she ran down the garden path.

"They are disappearing as fast as they can!"

"Of course they are disappearing," she laughed back; "they are going through the gap in the hedge."

"Gap in the hedge! Why wasn't it seen to?"

Mr. Morel raised himself with difficulty, and leaning heavily on his stick, hobbled after his grand-daughter.

By the time the latter reached the plot of grass, there were only two chickens left, and these she promptly captured and shut up in an out-house. Then she got on to a wheelbarrow and peered over the hedge in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the remaining seven.

A head immediately popped up on the other side, and she was confronted at very close quarters by the dark, determined face of a remarkably handsome man.

"How dare you!" she said frowning.

"How dare *you*!" he returned frowning likewise. "I'll have you up for trespassing."

"Trespassing! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. These are my grounds, and your head and shoulders are protruding into them."

Phœbe drew back, colouring hotly.

"I think you are a very rude man," she said, and stopped in blank amazement, for without a word he fell flat down on his back and remained perfectly motionless; and at the same moment her grandfather, who had been poking his stick backwards and forwards through the hedge, called out—

"I've caught one of them, Phœbe; I've caught—— well, of all the slippery customers!" he broke off, staring stupidly at the hooked handle of the stick as he drew it cautiously towards him.

"Oh!" Phœbe cried, jumping off her barrow and regarding her grandfather with dismay. "I believe it was a man you caught, or else he's in a fit; I must go round and see."

"Yes, my dear, run round and see; but I don't think they've got into a pit. I don't think there is a pit anywhere in the grounds," soliloquised the deaf old gentleman, as, after marking where the hedge required mending, he returned to his bench and proceeded to fill his pipe.

Meanwhile Phœbe had pushed open the big iron gate which so closely adjoined the small wooden one of Lime Cottage, and running swiftly along the moss-grown path knelt down by the prostrate man. She asked him timidly if he were hurt, but receiving no reply touched his forehead, under the heavy waves of dark hair, and thought it felt cold and clammy; this, however, was pure imagination. Phœbe was about to shout for help, when she fancied she detected a slight twitching at the corners of his mouth. If, after all, he were only pretending! But no; why should he?

She laid her hand over the region where she might reasonably expect his heart to be, only that if this were Squire Kingston, as she supposed, people said he had no heart. And then—Phœbe was almost startled out of her senses—the man suddenly sprang up, and seizing her hands, held her a prisoner.

"Oh, let me go! Please let me go!" she cried, struggling wildly to release herself; but Squire Kingston (for he it was) only tightened his grasp.

"No, no!" he said, staring at her with a half-amused, half-cynical smile. "I am not going to let you escape. You came to me of your own free will, and I mean to keep you until you have made me a promise."

"I will promise anything," the girl said desperately.

"Very well. I suppose you are aware that I could have Mr. Morel arrested for—shall we say for common assault?"

"Indeed, indeed he did not mean to hurt you. He," laughing nervously as she glanced at the tall, broad-shouldered man beside her, "he thought you were a chicken!"

"Then let him continue to think so," returned the squire gravely. "The moment you undeceive him, he must be prepared to take the consequences of knocking me down in my own garden."

"You mean," said Phœbe, opening wide eyes of astonishment, "that I am to tell my grandfather you are a chicken!"

"I mean that you are not to tell him anything. You are not to mention having seen me at all. Do you understand?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Now let me go—please!" she implored.

"Promise me," he said, in a tone of command.

"Yes, I promise," Phœbe rejoined very earnestly; and the strong arm being at once removed she sprang to her feet and went flying down the path.

But before she reached the gate, Squire Kingston overtook her. "Not so fast if you please, young lady!" he said, laying a detaining hand on her arm; "I want you to make me another promise."

"Oh, no, no! I can't; I can't make any more promises! Oh, please let me go!" There were tears in Phœbe's eyes now.

"What's your name?" inquired her tormentor, planting his back against the gate and gazing steadily into the pretty, tragic young face.

"Phœbe Little."

"Very well, then, Phœbe Little—or shall we say 'Little Phœbe, for choice? Tell me, have you a sweetheart? Perhaps you are even engaged to be married!"

Phœbe's face turned crimson; no one had ever so spoken to her; tears welled up to her eyes.

"You have no right to talk to me like that," she cried. "It's only the servants who talk about sweethearts and all that. I never even wished to be engaged."

"Then all I can say is that the young men of the neighbourhood must be blind. This must be a very benighted place. I shall have to set it a better example."

"I must go back to grandfather," was all Phœbe replied. She could not in the least understand this strange man, who spoke to her as no one had ever spoken before; and she suddenly came to the conclusion that he must be laughing at her.

"Very well, little Phœbe, then I will say good night!" said this perplexing squire, his fingers closing firmly for a moment over hers. "By-the-bye," he added carelessly, as he opened the gate an inch, "I have something particular to say to you, but as you don't wish to be detained this evening it must wait until to-morrow. Meet me at three o'clock in the plantation at the entrance to the wood."

"Oh, I can't, I can't indeed! Grandfather would not let me."

"Mr. Morel will know nothing about it," he declared coolly. "What! are you forgetting your promise already?" Phœbe remained speechless.

"Then—I shall expect you at three!" and without waiting for an answer, Squire Kingston lifted his hat and sauntered slowly back up the garden path.

"Gad!" he mused, thoughtfully pulling his long moustache, "What a face! Who would have thought of coming across beauty so rare in this dull hole. I might do worse than remain here for a couple of weeks and amuse myself with the charming Phyllis. Why should I not rouse that slumbering heart, and so attune the strings that they should respond and vibrate to every touch of mine? Why not?"

He caught sight, in the gathering dusk, of some small moving objects. "'We are seven,'" he murmured softly, "seven dissipated little chickens who deserve beating," and so saying, he bundled them all unceremoniously through the gap in the hedge. Then he looked about for something with which to fill in the aperture, but seeing nothing, removed his Panama hat, and used it as a plug.

He took out his cigar-case.

"There would be the deuce and all to pay if old lawyer Morel knew I was here; but she won't tell. The girl is as true as steel; I read it in her eyes. And *what* eyes! Let me see what do they remind me of? Wood violets, with the dew upon them—yes, that's it! And I declare those full pouting lips were formed for kissing.

No lover in the way. Basil, old fellow, you're in luck. The house party at Moorlands can offer you nothing so seductive in the way of womankind as this charming discovery. 'Little Phœbe,' poor frightened bird, I am going to clip your wings; your days of freedom are numbered." With which last observation Basil Kingston, Captain 7th Dragoon Guards, tossed away the end of his cigar, and entered his ancestral hall, trolling out in his rich tenor voice—" *Là ci darem la mano.*"

And the next morning he despatched the following telegram to a friend in London:—

"Sorry, not able to join your party. Detained here on business. Hope to see you at Portsmouth before expiration of leave."

II.

"GRANDFATHER," Phœbe said, as the two sat at breakfast, "why do people call Squire Kingston heartless and bad?"

The delicate bloom deepened on the girl's cheeks as she put the question, and she kept her eyes fixed on her plate.

"Because he *is* heartless and bad," Mr. Morel replied, bringing his hand down on the table emphatically. "What would *you* call a man who runs away with other men's wives, and leads an idle dissipated life?"

"But Squire Kingston is a soldier, so he can't be very idle," Phœbe rejoined, ignoring the main count against him.

"Bless my soul! What do *you* know about it? I tell you the man is a reprobate just as his father was before him; it's in the blood."

"But he is brave," the girl persisted. "He must be brave or he couldn't be a soldier."

The lawyer laid down his knife and fork and stared at her curiously.

"Now what in the world," he asked slowly, "has put Squire Kingston into your mind?"

"I—I don't know. I suppose," said Phœbe, miserable at the deception she was called upon for the first time to practise, "it was being in his grounds last night; such beautiful grounds, grandfather."

"A perfect wilderness! A tangle of grass and weeds! If the Squire looked after his property a bit instead of—but it's better as it is, better as it is," he broke off, still staring hard at Phœbe. "We don't want any of his sort prowling about these parts, making love to girls, as this young scamp's father did—the scoundrel!"

"Oh, grandfather, that is a dreadful word."

"It isn't too dreadful for the man, Phœbe; he broke your mother's heart."

"My—mother's!" Phœbe gasped.

"Yes, your mother's. I've never told you the story, but if you like I'll tell it now. It can do no harm, and it may be a warning to you."

Phoebe said, "Please, grandfather," and shivered involuntarily as she took a low seat by his side, leaning her bright head against his knee.

"You are a pretty girl, Phæbe, a very pretty girl," Mr. Morel began; "but you are not so pretty as your mother was at your age. She was just the fairest flower that ever bloomed, and as happy as the day was long, till Squire Kingston—the present Squire's father—cast his covetous eyes upon her. He came down here with a large party for the shooting, twenty years ago this very month. The hall was filled from basement to attic, and there were gay doings; dances and dinners and frolic of all sorts. The place was like a fair; and though I was blind as a bat at the time, suspecting nothing wrong, I learnt afterwards that the Squire used to steal away from his guests and meet my Mary down by Church-end farm; we lived at the other side of the village then, in the big house over the offices. He fairly bewitched the girl with his grand airs and good looks and bold wooing, and he a married man—the villain! He left no stone unturned to win her from her rightful lover, Tom Little, who was the rector's eldest son, and himself training for the ministry. He worshipped the very ground she trod on. He was wide-awake, too, was Tom; and in the end he saved his sweetheart—saved her from that base bad man. The Squire had got her consent to go with him to London, he pretending that his present marriage was not legal, and that he could leave his wife whenever he pleased; and Mary was so innocent she believed him, and agreed to meet him at the cross roads on a certain night, when a carriage would be in waiting to convey them to Southampton. But Tom, ever on the alert, got wind of the affair, and when Squire Kingston lifted my poor girl half-fainting into the carriage, he was on the box beside the coachman and whipping up the horses he drove her straight home."

The old lawyer paused, smiling grimly, and Phæbe, who had been listening with bated breath, heaved a little sigh of relief.

"The night was dark as pitch and the Squire knew no more than Adam where he was being taken; no doubt supposing when the carriage stopped, that they had reached the terminus whence they were to take train for London. I should like to have seen his face when Tom opened the door and seizing Mary in his arms disappeared with her in the darkness; while the coachman, deaf to the Squire's furious shouts to him to stop, started back immediately the road they had come, depositing his fare ultimately in the livery stables of an adjoining town. And the first I knew of what had happened, was being awaked by the rattling of stones against my bedroom window, and Tom's voice calling softly, 'Hush! for the love of heaven, and don't rouse the house, but creep down quietly and let us in.' You may think I was staggered, but I trusted Tom and just did what he told me;

and the moment the door was opened, Mary slipped past me like a ghost, and, running upstairs, shut herself into her own room. Then Tom told me all, and his last words to me that night, were: 'Mind, not a word to Mary! She has promised to marry me in a month, and I shall know how to guard my own.' Well, it was nigh on three months before the marriage took place, for Mary caught a cold that night which fastened on her chest, and she was confined to her bed for many weeks with the doctor attending. She was never the same afterwards. In spite of all Tom's love and care she drooped and faded, and when you were barely a month old she died. Decline, the doctor called it, and maybe it was, maybe it was; her mother died of consumption and Mary was never very strong. But to my mind she died of a broken heart; it was plain to be read in her beautiful, sad face, though she never complained and was just as sweet and patient as could be. Poor, pretty Mary," Mr. Morel concluded, brushing his hand across his eyes.

Phæbe was crying quietly, but she managed to articulate, "My father?"

"Ah, he was terribly cut up, poor fellow; and when you were a little toddling mite of three, he died of a fever which was raging in the district down by the river yonder. I retired from active business then, having a fair competency, and moved here with you and the faithful soul who has been like a mother to you. Why, Phæbe, crying? Oh, hush, my dear; you will make me sorry I told you your mother's story. There"—pushing back the curling masses of her gold-brown hair with his thin tender hand. "It was the will of Providence, just the will of Providence, Phæbe, and we must not murmur. The Squire? Killed in a duel; he got his deserts," the old lawyer answered shortly.

"And Mrs. Kingston?" Phæbe asked tremulously.

"She was a Spanish lady, very proud and handsome. I used to see her driving through the lanes with her boy by her side; a splendid little chap he was then, and doffed his cap with quite an air to the villagers, who would cheer the 'young squire' as he was called. Mrs. Kingston did not look happy, and I heard that long before her husband's death she left him and went back to her own country taking the child with her. He was brought up in Spain was the present squire, and inherits a deal of property there, besides what he has in this country. He's as rich as he's bad," finished the lawyer laconically, as he rose and declared that he "must go and have a look round, and see about repairing that fence."

* * *

There is nothing more curious than the ingenuity with which a woman will find excuses for a man whose sins are sins against her own sex, and about whose delinquencies there hangs a mysterious halo of romance. As Phæbe went about her household duties that morning, she found a hundred excuses for Basil Kingston, not one of

which even that sad rake himself would have deemed plausible. His early training and associations ; a wild, dissolute father ; a proud, passionate mother ; a Spanish nurse who indulged his every caprice ; and then, later, the many temptations to which he was exposed by reason of his great wealth and strikingly handsome appearance. His face, in its dark romantic beauty, reminded Phœbe of those knights in armour who had looked down at her from their frames in the oak dining-room at the Hall, when, as a child, she had been taken there by her nurse. It was the proud face of one accustomed to command and be obeyed. He had commanded her—Phœbe Little ! Should she obey ? Should she meet him in the plantation that afternoon ?

This was the question she kept asking herself all through dinner, as she sat opposite her grandfather ; but even while she knew instinctively what his answer would be, she seemed to feel the power of a pair of dark compelling eyes, to hear a peremptory voice saying, " I shall expect you ! " and the remembrance filled her with a strange excitement and unrest.

Presently her grandfather noticed that she was eating nothing, and asked anxiously if she was not feeling well. Phœbe's pale face flushed suddenly as she murmured something about the heat ; and then Mr. Moral said what, had he known the truth, he would sooner have cut out his tongue than say.

" Phœbe, my dear, I think that while the weather continues so hot, it will be well for you to go to and from the village by way of the plantation. It's a bit further but it's shady and pleasant, and with so much fever about, I don't feel easy. Only for this tiresome rheumatism I would go myself."

" Very well, grandfather," she responded without looking up.

" And don't hurry yourself, my dear. I don't expect anything of importance from the office, and you know I don't often read the London papers before tea. I—why, what are you laughing at ? " he broke off, laughing too, for surely nothing so contagious as Phœbe's sweet girlish laughter was ever before heard.

" You can't read with your eyes shut, grandfather," she returned saucily, " and you never open them till I bring you your tea."

" You baggage ! Be off with you ! Don't forget to call at the post-office, and mind you keep well under shelter of the trees in the plantation."

So it was settled for her ; the good old man who loved her, himself urging the girl to take the first fatal step on her disastrous journey.

But Phœbe's heart was light as she dressed for her walk ; no premonition of danger came to her as she put on a fresh blue cambric gown and a big hat trimmed with cornflowers and marguerites. She sang softly as she walked down the garden-path, pausing to gather a few carnations and fastening them into her belt. And so, with the faith of a woman in what *looks* good, and the fearlessness of a child in all things, Phœbe went forth to meet her fate.

III.

A MONTH has passed since that first meeting between Captain Kingston and Phœbe in the plantation—a month of mingled joy and despair to the one, of intoxicating happiness to the other.

As he stood waiting for Phœbe on that brilliant August afternoon four weeks ago, Basil Kingston can recall how, at sight of the pretty girlish figure emerging from under the lime-trees in the avenue, and advancing slowly towards him, he had experienced an entirely new sensation, a sudden stirring at his heart, an instant leaping into life of a feeling that had until then lain dormant.

The innocent, unsuspecting child! Her confidence in him, her utter guilelessness and unconsciousness of evil, appealed to him in a way that surprised even himself; and he resolved then and there that he would never betray her trust, that no harm should ever come to her through him.

Alas! he reckoned without a girl's tender, impressionable heart; and, not being a vain man, he failed to see that his very presence was a source of danger to Phœbe. He failed, too, at first to recognise that his own heart was not the adamant rock he had always imagined it to be; and thus, slowly, imperceptibly, he drifted into what became the one great love of his life.

Yet nothing occurred at that second meeting that might not easily have taken place at a casual encounter between acquaintances. Captain Kingston had gently chided Phœbe for coming through the hot sun to "keep her appointment;" and she had replied, with a pretty little air of dignity, that she was on her way to the village—she went every afternoon (oh, fatal admission!) "on business for grandfather."

Upon his remarking that that was rather a roundabout way to the village, Phœbe admitted that it was, but said her grandfather wished her to come that way because it was cooler than the high road. Then she observed with engaging frankness that she wanted to hear what he had to say that was "so particular." Captain Kingston laughed and turned the matter aside, but he walked with her to the entrance of the village and waited for her return; and he had not been able to resist the temptation of meeting her the following afternoon, and the next, and the next. So the mischief began.

After the heat and glare of a London season, with its ceaseless whirl of gaiety, its treadmill of fashionable existence, Phœbe's fresh, unspoiled nature acted upon his jaded senses as a sort of tonic—purifying, invigorating. He drank deep draughts of the healthful beverage, and ever thirsted for more, till hardly a day passed that he did not meet his "pretty elf" in the deep recesses of her own native woods. He never asked himself how it was all to end; the present moment sufficed, and he did not look beyond.

And during those golden autumn days a new world opened up for Phoebe; a glorified world wherein she dwelt with a fairy prince, whose eyes spoke a language she hardly at first understood, but the touch of whose lips thrilled through every nerve in her body, causing her joy unspeakable. The girl grew in beauty day by day, expanding like a flower beneath the sunshine of her lover's caresses, till he told her, laughing, that she fairly dazzled him. She was a little witch, and he would have to lock her up to prevent her from exercising her spells on some other poor fellow.

But it was strange how pale and haggard Captain Kingston himself became; and with what feverish anxiety he began, as September drew to a close, to watch for the postman every morning. His thoughts, indeed, seemed divided between his letters and his love—the postman and Phoebe, Phoebe and the postman—and then, at last, the blow fell; the news he had been expecting, and fearing, arrived. It came in the form of an official document, and as he tore it open, his face grew white as death. “Merciful heavens!” he ejaculated; “how am I to tell her?”

* * * * *

It was very lovely in the woods. Outside the shelter of the trees the sun was shining with almost midsummer warmth, but here it was all peace and cool green depths. The air was filled with the fresh damp smell of the meadow-sweet, and the faint subtle perfume of the pines. Underfoot, pine-needles lay as thick as a Persian carpet, while overhead the tree-tops arched and met; shafts of light here and there breaking through the gloom and forming fantastic, dancing patterns on the moss and roots.

Basil Kingston, seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, never removed his sad, despairing gaze from Phoebe's radiant face; and she, on the soft turf at his feet, her arms crossed on her knees, was smiling up at him—the happy smile of perfect confidence and love. But presently she noticed that he was pale, silent, preoccupied, and with pretty solicitude began asking if he were ill, if he had taken cold or had a headache?

“No, my darling, no,” he answered, and added, in tones tender as a caress: “Little Phoebe, *mio bel diletto*, I shall have to go away.”

“Oh, no,” she said, playfully clutching his arm. “I will not let you go—Basil!”

He had taught her to say his name, but she still hesitated shyly over it. She thought now that he was merely alluding to their daily parting, and she laughed softly, shaking back the clustering curls on her brow. Her innocent gaiety, her pretty cajolery, made Basil's task doubly hard.

“My darling, I am not joking—would to Heaven that I were! This morning I received my marching orders, and I must leave for London to-night.”

"Leave me!" she faltered, all her pretty colour fading, her eyes growing wide and dark.

"My child, I must. I am a soldier, you know, and have to obey orders. My regiment sails for India in less than a week, and— Why, Phæbe, little Phæbe! Oh, hush, hush, my darling!"

She had fallen forward with her head on his breast, and was sobbing piteously. This put the finishing touch to his remorse.

"I cannot let you go, Basil—oh, I cannot!" she wailed.

"My sweet, you make it harder for me," he murmured, kissing the eyes and lips that a moment ago had been so smiling and happy. "God knows I would stay with you if I could."

"Then," she cried, with a reckless abandon, "if you cannot stay with me, take me with you! Oh, Basil, take me with you! I shall die if you leave me behind."

There was a dead and dreadful silence. It lasted but a second, yet it seemed an hour before Basil spoke, his voice sounding curiously calm and passionless.

"There is only one way, only one; but if you will trust yourself to me, I swear you shall never regret it. Are you brave enough to defy the world's censure for my sake? Will you come away with me, little Phæbe, knowing the truth?"

"The truth!" she echoed, raising herself to read in his eyes the meaning his voice had failed to convey. "Ah, Basil, you frighten me. What is it?"

"It is—may God forgive me for deceiving you—that I have a wife living!"

With a look that Basil Kingston will remember to his dying day, she fell back in his arms, white and trembling. "My mother!" was all she said, staring at him strangely.

And he, crushing the lovely, anguished eyes against his breast, pressing his lips to the soft hair and cheeks, could not speak for the painful swelling that rose in his throat, the bitter self-reproach that choked his utterance.

How long he held her thus, closely clasped to his throbbing heart, neither ever knew. The twilight grew into darkness; the stars came out one by one; the harvest moon rose in golden splendour; but still they sat there, locked in each other's arms; the pines alone, mystic and solemn, bearing witness to the silent agony of those two human souls.

* * * * *

Late the following night a tall, soldierly-looking man with a stern, set face, walked into Lady Geraldine Kingston's box at Covent Garden Theatre and took a vacant chair behind her.

"Good gracious, Basil!" she exclaimed, turning round, "how you startled me! Why, what in the world's the matter?" she went on, staring at him curiously through her gold-rimmed *pince-nez*. "You look like a ghost."

"Do I? I can't say the same for you."

"Really? Well, I was afraid Cécile had been a little heavy-handed with the rouge to-night. Am I quite a fright?" she asked, with easy confidence.

He looked over her deliberately, indifferently, taking in every detail of her costly, elaborate toilet—the rich carmine on her cheeks and lips; the flashing jewels on her bare arms and neck; the elegant *coiffure*. And even as he did so, there rose up before him the vision of a blue-clad girlish figure, with a big hat resting on her bright curls; a sweet Greuze-like face, a delicately radiant complexion.

"Well," cried an impatient, fretful voice, "can't you make up your mind whether I look a fright or not?"

"You never look a fright, Geraldine," her husband answered coldly. "I came here to-night to say——"

But at that moment her attention was claimed by the gentleman at her side, and Basil leaned back in his chair with folded arms, a look of intense suffering on his face.

Presently his wife turned to him again, with an unpleasant smile. "After all," she said, "you need not have made the sacrifice."

"What sacrifice?"

"Do you suppose everyone did not know why you left London so suddenly? Mademoiselle, however, quickly consoled herself for your absence, so that your quixotic notion of saving the reputation of the charming *danseuse* met with——"

"Good heavens, Geraldine!" he broke in fiercely, "can you talk nothing but scandal? Does your mind never soar above the frailty and falsity of your own sex?"

She laughed airily. "You are a little too funny to-night; but since you ask the question I will confess that my thoughts do occasionally stray beyond a woman's weakness—even as far as a man's wickedness!" She leaned forward, laying a daintily-gloved hand on the shoulder of a man in front. "Lord Chevenix," she said, with scarcely veiled insolence, "allow me to introduce you to my husband in a new character—a preacher of morality—and, as you see, the *rôle* does not suit him. He looks——"

"As if he had seen a ghost," put in his lordship promptly, turning to shake hands with Basil.

"Just what I said!" exclaimed Lady Geraldine.

"So I have," he replied hoarsely, his eyes dark with emotion—"the ghost of what might have been. The life you live here is artificial, unworthy—I'm sick of it!"

"Since when?" murmured a voice in his ear, and a lady who had just entered bent upon him a pair of mocking, mischievous eyes.

Captain Kingston rose, offering her his seat. "Since you played *Queen Guinevere* to my *Sir Lancelot*," he replied brutally, in the same low tone, and with a curt bow left the box.

He saw his wife, later, as she swept to her carriage, leaning on the

arm of an Austrian Count. "Ah, Basil!" she said sweetly, "are you, too, leaving? Well, good night!"

"It is good-bye, Geraldine. I have received orders to join at once; we sail the end of the week."

"So soon? *Au revoir*, then! *Bon voyage!*" and with a careless nod she passed on. And this was the woman whom Basil Kingston had once thought he loved, whose statuesque beauty he had deemed the very perfection of female loveliness. He never dreamed that so fair a casket could hold aught but the purest gem; and he was young enough, and credulous enough, then, to take her protestations of affection for himself *au grand sérieux*. He found her vain, selfish, frivolous, heartless; and before the honeymoon was well over he had to acknowledge to himself that on the very threshold of life he had made an irreparable mistake. If, instead of having been merely dazzled and ensnared, he had really loved her he might have set to work to discover the good which, be it much or little, exists in all God's creatures—and made the best and the most of it. As it was they drifted steadily apart; though living in the same house, the poles could not be further asunder.

The daughter of an impoverished Irish Earl, Lady Geraldine Fermoy had, up to the time of her marriage, been denied much that she coveted. She then made up for lost time; plunging wildly into the vortex of London society; becoming a leader of fashion in a certain fast section of it; driving tandem in the park; following the hounds; dancing, flirting, and caring nothing what became of the man whose money she spent so freely. Lady Geraldine was, indeed, perfectly satisfied with her bargain. She had married for money, and as her husband made her an ample allowance she had nothing left to wish for. She never allowed anything to interfere with her day's enjoyment or her night's rest. She was, in short, a beautiful, soulless creature, destitute alike of sympathy and love.

As for Basil Kingston, his faith in all women broken because of the evil behaviour of one, he went on his way if not rejoicing at least indifferent, cynical, contemptuous. He richly revenged himself on the sex by which he had been duped. Possessing over women a magnetic power he exercised it without scruple—conquering them, scorning them, treating them as his slaves; and remaining unscathed himself, until the purity and sweetness of Phæbe Little woke within him feelings the strength and intensity of which completely overwhelmed him.

He, the victor, was, in his turn, vanquished. His love for the little, unsophisticated country maiden became the one absorbing passion of his life. Had a kind fate thrown her earlier across his path, who shall say that the record of Basil Kingston's life might not have been writ in letters of gold? Or who, knowing the circumstances of his marriage, but would hold Lady Geraldine as only one degree less responsible than himself for the sins he committed?

IV.

AN Indian sun is pouring down its hottest, fiercest rays upon a fair city on the bank of the Ganges; scorching the pavements where white-robed priests and beggars swarm, and huge Brahmin bulls are not only tolerated but protected; dazzling the eyes of crowds of pilgrims as they wend their way to one or other of the many temples with which the place abounds; and making resplendent the bright and varied tints of the costumes worn by the natives. Rows of white bungalows, enclosed within gardens, do not escape its pitiless glare; and in one of these houses, two officers in undress uniform are lounging when the English mail is brought in.

One of the men tossed his letters carelessly aside, as of no importance, and took up the *Times*; the other speedily became absorbed in his correspondence. Presently a startled exclamation, followed by the upsetting of a small wicker table, caused the latter to look up, then to rise hastily and cross to his friend's side.

"What is it, Kingston?" he inquired anxiously. "The heat? Here, drink this."

But Captain Kingston pushed the glass to one side and staggered to his feet, clutching the back of a chair for support.

"Munro," he said, speaking low and rapidly, "I want to go to England at once. You have influence with the Colonel—will you use it on my behalf and obtain me three months' leave on urgent private affairs? I should be indebted to you for more than life."

"My dear fellow, of course! Bad news, eh? There, you can explain another time. I will see the Colonel at once and—what's that you say? Send in your papers if I fail? Nonsense! I *shan't* fail. You look a fit subject for sick leave." And to himself Major Munro added, as he left the room: "Never saw a fellow so fallen off in my life. If it were anyone else I should say *cherchez la femme*, but Kingston is not the man to be fooled twice. Well, he shall have his leave, for, woman or no woman, we cannot afford to lose one of the smartest officers in the service, and another week here would kill him, I verily believe."

And this is what Basil Kingston read in the *Times* newspaper:—

Fatal Accident In The Hunting Field.

We regret to announce that Lady Geraldine Kingston, while hunting with the Galway hounds in the neighbourhood of Athenry, was thrown from her horse, receiving injuries which resulted in death taking place almost immediately.

Letters, and a delayed telegram, confirmed this news. And in a

corner of the same paper a brief paragraph told of the death, in the little Hampshire village, of Mr. John Morel.

* * *

The wind was whistling and moaning through the trees in the plantation, and soft flakes of snow were beginning to fall, as Basil Kingston turned into the lane, and, passing the Hall with scarcely a glance, pushed open the gate of Lime Cottage. An indescribable air of gloom and melancholy seemed to pervade the place; the path was thickly strewn with dead leaves, which crackled beneath his feet as he strode along to the front door, and in spite of his heavy fur-lined coat he was shivering as if with ague, he could scarcely steady his hand sufficiently to pull the bell.

"Miss Little?" he said, as soon as a servant appeared in response to his summons.

"Very ill, sir; not able to see anyone."

"She will see me." He stepped into the hall, and taking a card from his pocket wrote a few words on it. "Take this to your mistress," he said to the astonished girl; "I will wait here."

He sank exhausted into a chair and tried to pull himself together. He was faint from loss of sleep and food; his mental faculties seemed slipping from him, and that cruel inward voice which had accompanied him all the way from India kept up its maddening refrain, "Too late! too late!"

When the servant returned and invited him to go upstairs, he followed her in a dazed sort of way, like a man walking in his sleep, till they came to a curtained door at the end of a passage. He noticed the curtain because it was blue, just the colour, he thought, of little Phæbe's frock; and he remembered taking off, mechanically, his travelling cap and coat and laying them on a side-table. Then the door was opened from the inside, and a motherly-looking woman motioned him to enter, herself passing out and closing the door behind her.

He stood for a moment just within the room, trying to recollect who he was and what he had come there for. How hot it was! A deadly faintness was creeping over him, dulling his senses and making everything appear blurred and indistinct. What was that? Ah, of course! Now he understood it all. The heat proceeded from a large fire burning in the grate over there, and that noise was caused by falling cinders.

Gradually objects became clear to him, and he saw that he was in a comfortable apartment, half bedroom, half sitting-room; a shaded lamp was burning on a centre table, and on a couch, drawn up close to the hearth, a girl in soft white draperies was reclining, the rich masses of her gold-brown hair tumbling in picturesque disorder about the pillows—a girl so frail, so shadowy, with a face so ethereal, that an icy hand seemed to clutch his heart as he gazed spellbound at her.

"Great heavens!" he ejaculated, great beads of perspiration gathering on his brow. "*That*—my Phœbe! Little Phœbe!"

And the next moment he was on his knees beside the couch, for a pair of great, sweet, star-like eyes had opened full upon him, and a faint voice had uttered his name. "Basil," she said, with oh! such a world of tenderness in the low accents; and as he took her into his arms, bending his lips to hers, the death-like pallor of her face gave place to a faint pink tinge.

"Have you been ill?" she questioned presently, raising a transparent hand to stroke his cheeks.

"No, my darling, no! Wearying for you, that was all. You have not been absent from my thoughts for a moment, sweetheart; and as soon as ever I was free—— Phœbe! Little Phœbe! Oh, great Heaven, I have killed her!"

She lay back in his arms, white and motionless, scarcely seeming to breathe; but the frail thread that bound her to life had not snapped. God, in His great mercy, had decreed otherwise; and Phœbe was to enjoy, as only those who have tasted its sweetness can enjoy, the exquisite bliss of a lover's return after long absence.

"So long it has seemed, Basil, so long," she murmured, keeping her eyes always fixed on his face. "But I waited, as you told me, and I tried to be patient. I said I would be true to you, Basil, till death."

"Hush, hush, my beloved! Who talks of death? I am going to nurse you back to health; to marry you as soon as ever you are well enough. Do you hear me, my darling? I am free, free to make you my own little wife. I have travelled day and night to tell you so, and we will never be parted more."

He was fighting madly, fiercely, desperately, with the truth that he fancied he saw written so clearly on the girl's wan face. He strained her passionately to his breast; he would not let her go, she should not die. And, indeed, it seemed as if the pressure of his lips gave new life to Phœbe. She lifted her weak arms and clasped them round his neck.

"Mine, Basil; all my own at last!" she breathed, a great joy transfiguring her face.

"And, my little one, darling of my heart, will she forgive her poor Basil the pain and suffering he——" A great sob rose in his throat, choking further utterance.

"Forgive you, Basil! Ah, you made my life beautiful—so beautiful! Such happiness you gave me as I had never even dreamed of. You were my king—I loved you—and I could not—live—without you. I loved—I—— Ah—Basil!——"

* * * * *

The nurse waiting in the adjoining room was roused from the doze into which she had fallen by a terrible cry—a heartbroken, despairing cry—that rang through the silent house.

The nurse, even before she opened the door of the sick room,

knew instinctively what had occurred. The excitement, as she feared, had been too much for her child, who had fallen into one of those death-like swoons which had taxed all the doctor's skill and resource to combat.

She found her charge stretched apparently lifeless on the couch; and, no doubt under the impression that Phæbe was dead, Basil Kingston had fallen senseless to the floor. She set about applying the usual remedies, but without producing any effect; and she was growing seriously alarmed, when the doctor's welcome step was heard on the stairs. The next moment he entered the room.

In a few words the nurse explained what had happened, and the doctor, after a keen glance at Basil, devoted himself to Phæbe.

"She will do now," were the first words Basil heard, as consciousness slowly returned; "and I don't anticipate any further trouble of this nature. Happiness is a wonderful restorer—to Miss Phæbe it is life itself. But let her be kept as quiet as possible; she will probably sleep till morning if nothing occurs to disturb her, and you may then feed her with beef-tea, a spoonful at a time, not more, though, unless I am greatly mistaken, you will be surprised at her appetite."

He turned to Basil, who had been lifted on to the couch. "Squire Kingston, did you say? Bless my soul! Ah, he's coming round. Give me the brandy and water—so! Dear me, the poor fellow is almost in as bad a case as his sweetheart. I should say he had not broken his fast for twenty-four hours. Now, how's that? You feel a little better, eh? What's that you say? Miss Little dead! Nonsense—nothing of the sort! Merely a faint. Am I sure? Perfectly sure. You may see for yourself as soon as you are able to rise. You are able now? Come, then, lean on my arm. Steady, there now—that's right."

Dr. Peirce had seen strange and moving sights in his time, but he thought he had never seen anything more pathetic than this pair of lovers, who had positively been dying for love of one another.

"Well," he whispered gruffly, to hide his emotion, "are you satisfied? If all goes well, I hope to have my patient downstairs in a week or ten days. What's that? You will take her to Algiers for the remainder of the winter and spring? Exactly—a capital idea! Trust a man in love to know what is best for his sweetheart!" And the kind old doctor, after assuring himself that the Squire was prepared to do justice to the good things provided for him, wrung his hand and departed.

"What a pair of lovers!" he ejaculated, as he stepped into his carriage; and there was a suspicious moisture about his eyes as he added, "Absolutely dying for one another!"

And Basil Kingston fell asleep that night with a prayer on his lips, and an expression on his face that meant even more than the prayer.

CAROL YOUNG.

A STUDY IN GREY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," "MEMORIALS OF MRS. HENRY WOOD," ETC., ETC.

ONLY a few miles from Montserrat and within sight of some of its mountain peaks, you find the wonderful old town of Manresa. Thither we wended our way one gloomy morning.

From the skies came a constant downpour of rain, with almost tropical force. We were well sheltered and comfortably housed in Barcelona, but H. C. declared that the rainy season had set in, and if we waited for the weather, we might wait for ever.

Acting upon this rash assertion we departed under lowering skies. Water ran down the streets like small rivers, and the omnibus waded to the station.

"Such days have their beauty," said H. C. putting on his best military style. "The effect of atmosphere is very fine. And after all we are not made of sugar."

"We had need be to bear such an infliction calmly," we returned; but the sarcasm was lost upon H. C. who pretended to be studying some very deep and telling tones in the clouds.

The very train seemed to struggle against the elements, as it made way through the Catalan hills and valleys, and we certainly acknowledged a peculiar charm as we saw them half veiled through the mist and the rain, that yet was distinctly depressing. On nearing Manresa, it lightened a little: the clouds lifted and the rain ceased, but only for a short respite.

Nothing could be more striking than the approach to the old town. Perched on a hill, outlined against the grey sky was the famous old cathedral, rising upwards like a vision. Far down at the foot of the hill ran the rapid river, winding through the country between deep banks. A splendid old bridge added much to the impressive scene, about which there was a wildness that seemed very much in harmony with the grey and gloomy skies.

As we crossed the bridge outside the railway station, a young man, well built, handsome, with a fresh colour and an honest face, came up to us, and offered to fetch us a carriage or personally conduct us to the hotel. Few people visit Manresa; omnibuses are unknown, and carriages not being adventurous, only come out when they are ordered. We chose to walk, in spite of the rain, which was coming down again with vengeance. The services of the guide were accepted, and we soon found that he filled the important office of general factotum to the hotel.

"Ah, señor," he said, taking us into his confidence in the first five minutes, "if you would only petition the padrone in my favour and get him to promote me to the dining-room! As it is, I fetch and carry all day long and scarcely earn money enough to pay for the boots I wear out." We certainly thought no time was being lost in enlisting our sympathies, and mildly suggested that the padrone might not thank us for meddling with his own affairs.

The streets were tremendously steep and stony and winding. Water streamed from the houses and ran down the hills, and the place altogether looked very hope-forsaken, for it especially needed the help of sunshine. Yet in spite of all we found it very interesting, and its situation is so striking that it could never be otherwise. We climbed on through the streets and thought the rain would never cease nor the walk ever end.

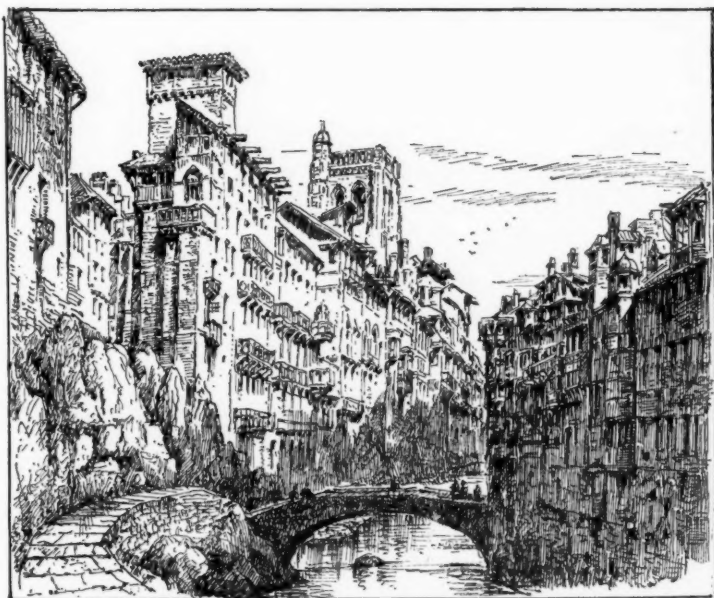
At last we reached the inn, which would hardly have been found without our guide. He pointed to it with pride, but we could not respond to the sentiment. The entrance was small, and we soon found ourselves mounting a narrow wooden staircase which had neither the fashion of Barcelona nor the majestic dignity of Gerona. The first landing opened to a long low room of many windows, looking old enough to have seen the birth and death of many a century. This was given over to the servants of the house, and the humbler folk whose rank entitled them to a place below the salt. They were seated at round tables—but certainly were not knights—in detachments of eight or ten, and their boisterous manners and loud voices kept us at a respectful distance, without any desire for a nearer approach. For ourselves, we had to go a stage higher in the world, represented by the second floor. Here we found the quality at breakfast—the substantial midday meal: a worthy crew hardly a degree better than those we had just interviewed. They proved, indeed, the roughest specimens we had yet met in Catalonia: an assemblage of small farmers, pedlars and horsedealers. Had the landlord added housebreakers to his list, one or two might have answered to the description.

But as travelling, like adversity, makes us acquainted with strange companions, and we cannot always choose our types, we sat down to the table with a good grace. The only alternative was to fast, a penance in which H. C. had no faith whatever. To-day this motley assemblage seemed peculiarly objectionable, without any of the redeeming points such people often have: that honest, straightforward speech, directness of purpose and modesty of demeanour which is a certain substitute for cultivation, and atones for the want of breeding. Nothing of this was perceptible to-day.

The room like the one underneath was long and low, but lighted only by one window at the end, so that we were in a semi-obscurity still further increased by the weeping skies. A redeeming feature was the civility of the inn people, a fault their slowness. To make

matters worse, the food was coarse and ill-served, and we had to pass almost everything. Long before déjeuner came to an end we left them to do it and went forth to explore. We had very little time to spare, having arranged not to spend the night in Manresa: a lucky arrangement on our part, for picturesque and striking as the place really is, its resources are soon exhausted. A wet evening in such an inn would have landed us in the profoundest depths of melancholy.

When we left the table we found that for the moment the rain had ceased. Our guide evidently thought it his duty to look after us, and



MANRESA.

no sooner caught sight of us as we passed downwards than he sprang up, leaving upon his plate a delicious piece of *black-pudding*. In vain we offered to wait whilst he finished his dinner. "You are very good, señor, but it is not necessary," he replied. "I am very fond of black-pudding, but this was my third helping, and really I had had enough."

This seemed probable. "Apparently the supply equals the demand," we said. "You must have a very liberal master in the landlord of the inn."

"Yes, that is true," returned Sebastien—for such he soon told us was

his name. "But we only have black-pudding once a week, and we ought to have it twice. We are agitating for it now, and as the padrone knows the value of a good servant I expect we shall get it."

Sebastien would not leave us again and became our shadow, sublimely indifferent to the rain which every now and then came down in waterspouts. To this day we feel that we saw Manresa under a cloud. It was a study in grey; and if we paid it another visit in sunshine we should probably not know it again. For this H. C. was responsible in preaching up his rainy season: the real fact being that the next day and for ever after we had blue skies and unclouded sunshine.

Manresa is rich in outlines. Its church towers stand out conspicuously on the summit of the rock on whose slopes much of the town is built. On leaving the inn we saw before us one of the old churches standing in solemn repose, grey and silent above the houses. The interior proved uninteresting in spite of the nave, wide after the manner of the Catalan churches. Sebastien thought every moment spent here waste of time. "It is cold and ugly," he declared, constituting himself a judge—and perhaps he was not far wrong. "It makes me shiver. But when the altar is lighted up on a Sunday evening, and the place is full of people, and the organ plays, and the priest gives the Benediction, then it is passable."

We felt inclined to agree with him, and wished we could see the effect of a Benediction service, but as this was not possible we left the church to its silent gloom and shadows, Sebastien cheerfully leading the way.

The streets, decayed and old-world looking, had a wonderfully picturesque and pathetic element about them, and on a bright day would no doubt have been full of charm. A canal ran through one of them, spanned by a picturesque single-arch stone bridge. On each side the houses rose out of the water, like a Venetian street; handsome, palatial, full of interesting detail; a multitude of balconies, many of rich wrought ironwork; many a Gothic window with deep mullions; many an overhanging casement, from which you might have dropped into the running stream. Waterspouts stood out like gargoyles, and the slanting tiled roofs were full of colouring. Towering above these rose a lovely church tower, splendid with Gothic windows and rich ornamentation and an openwork parapet, with a small round turret at one corner.

We stood long on the bridge, gazing at the wonderful scene, with its infinite detail and harmony of effect; the deep shadows reflected in the dark water which needed so much the blue sky and laughing sunshine. It was evident that Sebastien could not understand what kept us spell-bound. He stood by in patience, now looking at us intently as though trying to learn what was passing in our minds, now directing his attention to the water and the houses, as though to guess the secret of their fascination. Apparently he was hail-fellow-

well-met with everyone in the town—that dangerous element, a popular character; for not a creature passed us, man or woman, youth or maiden, but he had something to say to them.

"You seem to know everyone, Sebastien," we said, as we took our kodak out of the case he had slung over his shoulder, in the desire to carry away with us some of these splendid outlines.

"What would you, señor?" he returned. "The town is not large, the inhabitants do not change, and I was born and bred here. I am fond of company, and make friends with them all. I wanted to be a soldier and go out and see the world, but they said my sight was not strong enough, and they would not have me; so I turned to and took service in the hotel. I am comfortable enough, and just earn my living, without a trifle over for the old mother, but I don't see much prospect of rising unless I am promoted to the dining-room."

"Your eyes look quite strong," we observed; large blue eyes, bright and clear and without a sign of weakness about them.

"They are as strong as yours, señor—if I may say so," he replied. "I never could make out what they meant. Sometimes I have thought my old mother was at the bottom of it, and because I was her only child, went to the authorities and begged them to spare me. I don't *know* that she did, but I have my suspicions. One day I taxed her with it point-blank. She was very confused for a moment, and then told me not to be foolish—the authorities wouldn't pay attention to such as her, even if she had gone to them. I'm not so sure of that. The old mother has seen better days, and that is well-known, and when she goes out dressed in her best, with her black lace mantilla over her head which she has had ever since she was a young woman"—this no doubt referred to the mantilla not the head—"why she commands respect, and I can quite believe the authorities would listen to her."

"Why don't you try again with those eyes of yours?" we suggested. "You cannot be more than nineteen."

"Not more than nineteen," returned Sebastien, opening his blue eyes very wide. "Why, señor, I am twenty-three, going on for twenty-four. I know I look young, and do what I will I can't help it, and can't make myself look any older. I have tried hard to grow a moustache, but it is only just beginning to sprout."

He laughed, and we laughed with him, for the down upon his upper lip was of the most elementary description. He looked youthful in every way, but we cheered him with the reflection that it was a fault time would inevitably rectify.

"I have one consolation," he said. "At the fonda I get as much black-pudding as I want—once a week; in the army they don't give black-pudding at all. So if I have lost something, I have gained something too."

"Sebastien, we are ashamed of you," we returned laughing. "Would you sacrifice your birthright for a mess of pottage?"

"What does the señor mean?" asked Sebastien, looking puzzled.

"Have you never heard of Esau?"

"Never, señor. Was he a Spaniard or an Englishman? And was he, too, fond of black-pudding?"

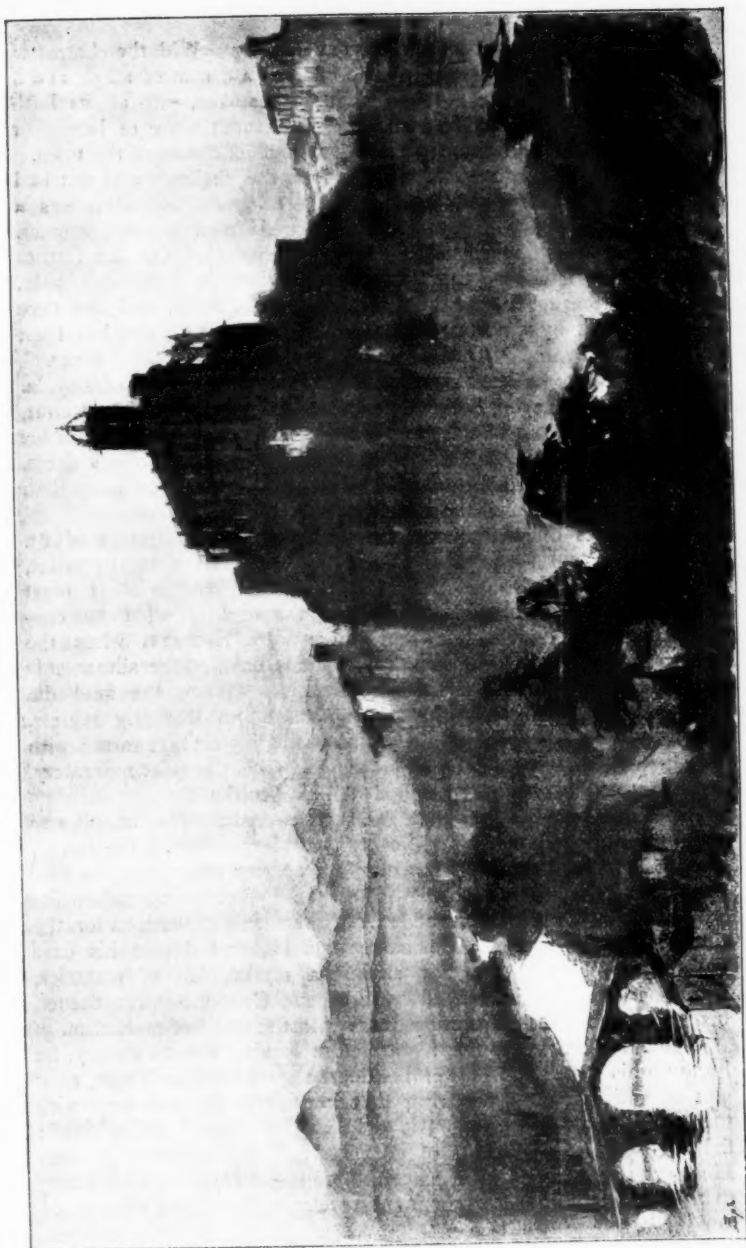
It was impossible to help laughing at the quaint remark; but we passed over the question, feeling that a course of Bible history begun on the bridge would come to an untimely end. So we left him to his ignorance and his preference for black-pudding unchecked, passed away from the canal, the old bridge and the ancient outlines, and climbed about the steep decayed streets. The rain poured through the water-spouts, and every now and then we came in for an unwelcome shower-bath. This highly amused Sebastien, who never enjoyed the fun more than when he himself was the victim.

Suddenly we found ourselves confronted by one of those views which come upon one as a revelation of what nature sometimes accomplishes. We had seen nothing equal to it, nothing to resemble it since we had left Fair Segovia. In sunshine the likeness might have been still more striking.

We had passed by a steep descent into the lower part of the town and stood upon the hill side. To our right rose the great Collegiate church of *Il Seo*, crowning a massive and majestic rock. Houses stretched far down the slopes, and the church rose above them in magnificent and startling outlines. It was built of yellow greystone that harmonised wonderfully with the grey skies. For the time being these had ceased to weep, and everything was bathed in a thin mist, which rolled and curled about and threw a wonderful romance and glamour over the scene, especially refining and beautifying.

Still below us, on the left, ran the broad river, with its dark, almost blood-red waters flowing swiftly under the high, picturesque bridge. We traced its winding course between deep banks far out into the country; just as we had traced it from the heights of Montserrat, which were not far off as the eagle flew. Here too everything was veiled in a thin mist.

The rock on which the church stood consisted of a series of hollows, where grew lovely hanging gardens and flowering trees. The church with its striking outlines looked massive enough to defy the ages. It was of the true fourteenth century Catalan type, and took the place of a church that had existed here in the tenth century. Its buttresses are especially large and prominent. The lofty tower stands over the north aisle. Four arched stone ribs crown the steeple, and within these a bell is suspended. A fine Romanesque doorway near it leads into the modern uninteresting cloister. Other fine doorways lead into the interior of the church. Its great size, high and wide, is impressive, but the details are trivial. The capitals of the enormous octagonal columns are poor, and the arches they support, thin and almost contemptible, take immensely from the general effect.



MANRESA FROM THE HILL-SIDE.

Here also, there was no need to remain long. With the charms of Barcelona cathedral lingering in the mind as a dream of magic and a world's wonder, the collegiate church of Manresa, with all its loftiness and expanse, was cold and lifeless, without sense of beauty or devotion. In its striking situation lies the chief charm of the town.

We went down the banks and stood on the shallows and watched the deep red waters rushing through the bridge. Beyond it was a shallow fall over which the waters poured in a crimson stream. Near the bridge stood a large, ancient crucifix. On the further bank of the river rose the outlines of the Cave of Ignatius Loyola. Above the cave has now been built a great church, and the cave itself, reached by a short passage in its north-east corner, has been turned into a votive chapel, to which pilgrims flock at stated times.

Manresa is of course for ever associated with the name of Loyola. He had been staying some time at the Monastery of Montserrat, preparing his mind for the great change he intended to make in his life. As he wandered about the mountain in his cavalier's dress, he must have looked far more like one fitted to lead an army than to become a member of the church militant.

One of his most frequent visits was to the Hermitage of St. Dismas, high up amongst the rocks. Here dwelt a saintly priest, Juan Chanones, who gave Loyola much holy counsel. It must needs be that Loyola deeply weighed the cost of what he contemplated: impossible but that there were moments when the tempter placed before him in the strongest colours the allurements and charms of the life he was renouncing. When the final die was cast there must be no turning back, no lingering regrets. Loyola was one of the last men to be vacillating or lukewarm; with him it was ever one thing or the other; and so in the quiet monastery, so far out of the world, he weighed well his decision.

Chanones was the very man for such a crisis. The hermit was one who imposed upon himself every possible penance. He fasted, wore a hair shirt, and spent many hours of the twenty-four in long prayers and devotions. Loyola had begun by confessing to him the whole of his past life, and confided his hopes and aspirations for the future: how he wished to become a monk, and devote his days entirely to religion. He was already a mystic, full of ecstasies, seeing visions and influenced by dreams. Chanones strengthened his resolutions and fired him yet more with the spirit of mysticism.

Under his influence, the night before leaving the monastery, he hung up his sword and dagger beside the image of the Virgin, as a sort of votive offering, declaring that henceforth he had done with the world and with wars. His only warfare should be spiritual: fighting against the powers of darkness and the influence of evil. He spent the whole night in prayer before the altar; where according to his mystic moods, many visions and revelations had been vouchsafed to him.

But earlier in the evening a slight event had happened.

It was the eve of the Annunciation, in 1522. Loyola had come down from the hermit's cave dressed in the rich garb of a cavalier which as yet he had not thrown off. In the hospederia of the monastery were many poor pilgrims; beggars dressed in rags. Meeting one of these, Loyola persuaded him to exchange his rags for his own splendid dress. Disguised in his sackcloth gown and girdle, few would have recognised the once magnificent knight. His head, accustomed to a helmet, was now bare. His left foot was unshod, and on his right he wore a sandal of grass. He was lame, for the wound in his leg—which had been the turning-point of his career—had never perfectly healed, and of late had become inflamed and painful. It was in this garb that he spent his last night at Montserrat.

He went forth next morning at daybreak with a few companions, one of whom was Juan Pascual. They had not proceeded many miles before they were overtaken by a hasty messenger who asked Loyola, if it was he who had presented a beggar with the rich dress of a cavalier. The story had not been believed and the man had been put into confinement. Loyola had to declare that it was true, lamented the trouble he had brought upon the beggar, and prayed that he might be liberated; adding that he had made the exchange from motives of penance and religion, as well as disguise. The messenger went back to the convent, and the little band of pilgrims continued their way.

They journeyed slowly, but the distance was not great. At noon they were overtaken by the mother of Pascual, who in company with others, was returning from celebrating the Feast of the Annunciation at Montserrat. This lady, Inez, directed him to the hospital of Santa Lucia, where he would obtain relief for his leg, which threatened to become troublesome if not dangerous. Inez quickly discovered that Loyola was no ordinary pilgrim, and supplied him with food from her own table during the five days that he remained in the hospital.

The day after his arrival he went up to the great church of *Il Seo*, and remained in prayer for five hours, seeking direction for his movements. At the end of five days he left the hospital for a room found him by Inez. Here he at once adopted that spirit of fasting and penance which knew no moderation and with him became fanaticism. The food sent him by Inez he gave away, and lived upon black bread and water. He constantly went bare-headed and bare-footed, wore a hair shirt like Chanones, and occasionally added to his sufferings by putting on a girdle made of the sharp leaves of the prickly gladiole. He neglected himself in every way, never cutting his nails or combing his hair and beard; so that he who had once been the most fastidious of cavaliers now became a byword to those who met him and gazed in contempt and derision. He spent much time at the hospital, nursing the sick, and always devoted himself to the most forbidding cases.

This life continued for four months, and then he withdrew to the cave which he declared had been miraculously revealed to him. It overlooked a valley called by the people the Vale of Paradise, and its existence was known to few.

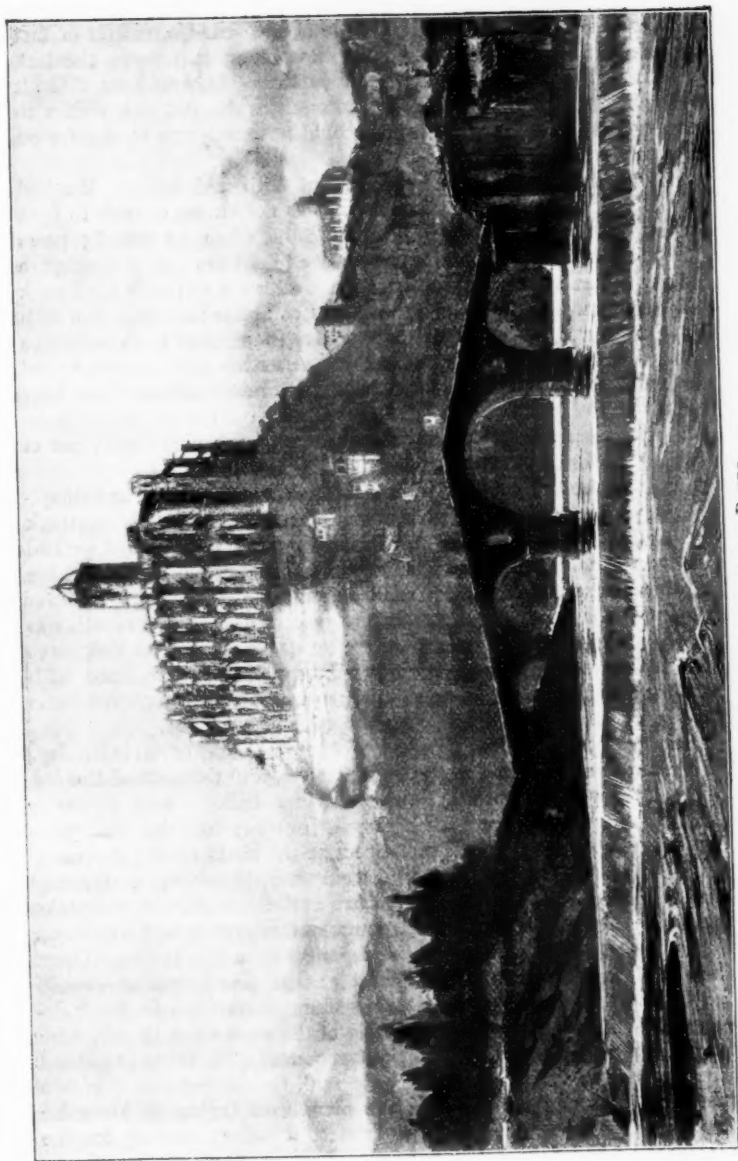
The cave was dark and small, and belonged to a friend of Loyola's, who lived to be a century old. Here he existed in great seclusion, spending seven hours of every day in prayer, and often remaining on his knees all night. It was here that he chiefly composed his "Spiritual Exercises," which contain so much beauty and devotion; so much that seems essentially *spiritual*. Here also came to him the first idea of the Order of Jesus, which he afterwards founded. But it must be remarked that the Jesuit Society as framed and thought out by Ignatius Loyola was a more simple and unworldly institution than it afterwards became. His own rules seem to have been very pure and without guile or worldly ambition; his mind embraced only Heaven and the things which concerned Heaven. If Loyola were to return now to earth, he would be the first to condemn many of its principles and practices and to say "These are none of mine."

That he became truly spiritual, as perhaps has been given to few, cannot be doubted by any one who had read his writings and studied his life. We of another creed cannot be in touch with him on many points, but all must profoundly admire his absolute death to self, the perfect resignation of all his thoughts and wishes to the Divine guidance.

In Manresa, we have said that his penances amounted to fanaticism. His prayers and fastings so weakened the body, that frequently for hours and sometimes for days he would lose consciousness, and fall into death-like swoons. He retired to his cave and was haunted by a morbid recollection of his past sins. For many months he was filled with horror and knew nothing of peace of mind or spiritual consolation. He was haunted by terrible voices and visions; and it was only after body and soul had, as it were, been torn asunder, and he had gone through all the agonies of a living spiritual death, that at last peace and light, the certainty of pardon and the Divine favour, came to him.

After that his past life seems to have been placed behind him; to have known him no more. He became a teacher of men; a great spiritual healer in whom the heavy-laden found comfort and encouragement; a profound reader of the human heart, to which he never ministered in vain. Perhaps one of his greatest weapons was his humility, by which he placed himself on a level with all who came to him, and which enabled him to apply in the right way all the deep and earnest sympathy that was in him.

His visions, the voices he heard, the so-called miracles he witnessed, these were no doubt delusions due to the highly wrought imagination and ecstatic state of the mystic; but with Loyola they did not end



MANRESA FROM THE RIVER.

here. They bore fruit. He was practical as well as theoretical: and dead as he became to self, a little of the sensible, matter of fact discipline of his early training must have clung to him to the last. His after life was full of activity and action. It would be difficult to say where he did not go, what countries he did not visit with practical issues, in days when men could not easily run to and fro on the earth as they do now.

Loyola died as he had lived, full of faith and hope. He had caught the malarial fever in Rome, and was not strong enough to fight against it. In August 1556 the end came, when he was 65 years old. But in everything except years he might have gone through a century of time. His physical powers were worn out with hard work and abstinence, and perhaps the greatest miracle in connection with Ignatius Loyola, was the fact that he lived long after the vital forces should have ceased to hold together. After his death it was found difficult to discover what power had kept him alive during his later years.

Thus Manresa is for ever connected with the name and fame of Ignatius Loyola, the saint.

Crossing the bridge and winding through a very ancient and dilapidated part of the town, we presently reached the church which struck us as being new and gaudy, with little to recommend it. But we had come to see what had once been the cave, and wished we could have found it in its original state. Certainly the saint himself would never recognise it as the old earthy cavern 9 feet by 6, whose mouth was concealed by brier bushes, and where he was wont to pass long days and nights in prayer and fasting. The walls are now lined with marble; a light burns before the altar; some poor sculpture represents Loyola writing his book and performing his first miracle.

The view from his cave must have been magnificent even in his day. There in front of him ran the famous river, and there stood the old bridge. Beyond it rose the rock with its hollows and gardens; and towering above were the splendid outlines of the collegiate church. Beyond all in the distance rose the chain of the Pyrenees, undulating and snowcapped; whilst in one distant spot, standing alone, clearing the sky with their sharp outlines, appeared the peaks and pinnacles of Mons Serratus; the monastery resting half way down on its plateau, far more beautiful and perfect than it is to-day. Upon this the hermit Loyola—as he might at that time be called—would fix his eyes for hours day after day, seeking inspiration for his “Exercises,” perhaps occasionally dreaming of the days when he still wore his cavalier’s dress and had not yet renounced all the pomps and vanities of the world. But as we have said, he was not a man of two minds; having put his hand to the plough, as far as we know he never turned back even with the faintest regret or longing for the pleasures he had deliberately put from him.

Sebastien our guide was evidently a good Catholic, with a great

reverence for Loyola, with whom he was more familiar than with Esau. He watched us narrowly as we entered the chapel, and was evidently disappointed at the little impression made upon us: expecting a drop-down-deadness of manner when we stood before the effigy of the saint, which unfortunately only excited a feeling of irritation at the badness of its workmanship.

So we were not sorry to find ourselves once more under the skies, dark and lowering though they were. Here indeed the magnificent view, the splendid outlines of Manresa, all slightly veiled in that charming mist, might well appeal to all one's sense of the beautiful and the sublime, and raise emotions the poor votive chapel could never inspire.

As we went back into the town, for the moment it seemed very much haunted by the presence of Loyola. Passing a picturesque little house in the centre of a small garden, Sebastien suddenly stopped in front of it and gave a peculiar call, whilst a flush of expectation passed over his face. Surprised at the movement we stopped and waited for the sequel. This quickly followed in the opening of a casement, at which appeared the charming head of a young woman.

"Sebastien!" she cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "Have you come to see me?"

"Yes," returned Sebastien, "since I see you now. But I cannot come in, Lucia. I am guiding these gentlemen through the town, and I have to show them everything; they would be lost without me. We have just been to the chapel of the saint, where I said a short prayer for our speedy marriage. Ah! when will it be?"

"Patience, patience!" cried the fair Lucia. "I am getting on well, and you must make il padrone advance you to the dining-room. Oh, it will all come right. And then, we are both young and can afford to wait."

We thought it a pity such an interesting conversation should be carried on in a public thoroughfare, and at such a tantalising distance. and offered Sebastien five minutes' interval if he liked to go in and pay his respects to his ladye-love. But he declined, and wafting a warm salute to the fair vision in the casement, intimated that he was again at our service.

"She is the sweetest girl in Manresa," said Sebastien quite openly, "and I am a lucky fellow to have won her. Unfortunately we are both poor. But Lucia is with a dressmaker, and will soon be able to start on her own account; we shall not have much difficulty in getting on, if the padrone will only advance me—as indeed I deserve."

We congratulated Sebastien upon his good fortune and wished him promotion and success: and looking at his straight-forward open face, so singularly free from guile, we thought the fair Lucia was by no means to be consoled with, however humble their prospects.

Then we made way into the upper part of the town, and presently Sebastien turned into a chapel attached to a convent.

It was a small building of no pretension, but there was a marvellous repose and quietness about it. A screen divided the body of the church from the altar, and immediately before the altar, separated from us by the screen, was a strange and striking vision.

Two young girls who might have been some eighteen years old, knelt side by side at the foot of the steps. They were motionless as carven images and were dressed in white. Their veils were thrown back, but their faces, turned towards the altar, were invisible. Their posture was full of grace, and their dress, whether by accident or design, was becomingly arranged and fell in artistic folds. All the time we looked they moved neither hand nor foot, and might have been, as we have said, carved in stone. We almost felt as if we were gazing upon a vision of angels, so wonderfully did the light fall upon them as they knelt: whilst we, in the body of the church were in semi-obscurity.

Presently a bell tinkled, a side door opened, and two other young girls very much of the same age and dressed in exactly the same way, entered. The two at the altar rose, made deep and graceful curtsies, and veiling their faces, passed out of the chapel. Those who entered at once threw back their veils; in the obscurity we are not observed. We had full view of their charming faces, far too charming to become the nuns for which Sebastien said they were qualifying.

"They are White Ladies," he whispered to us, "and very soon will be cloistered, and never see the world again. It is enough to break one's heart."

"You don't approve of nunneries, Sebastien?"

"Ah, señor, I shudder at the thought. It occurs to me what a terrible thing it would be if Lucia were to turn nun instead of becoming my happy wife—at least I shall do all I can to make her happy. But these poor girls—think for a moment of the humdrum life they are taking up; nothing to look forward to; no change, no pleasure of any sort. They might as well be buried alive at once and put out of their misery.

As the door opened to admit the two novices—if novices they were—we had caught sight of others in the passage; some eight or ten, as we fancied. An elderly nun, equally dressed in white was going amongst them, almost, as it seemed, in the act of benediction. She was evidently counselling, encouraging, fortifying those to whom she ministered. One might have thought that passing through that doorway was renouncing an old life and taking up a new one; an irrevocable step and choice from which there was no recall and no turning back.

H. C. was taken with a lump in his throat, as the young fair women unveiled moved towards the altar. One of them was certainly very beautiful. Large wistful blue eyes stood out in contrast with the ivory pallor of her oval face, than which the spotless veil was not more pure and chaste.

It was too much for H. C.'s equanimity. He coughed and betrayed himself.

She turned hurriedly; and seeing a face that corresponded to her own in pallor, and eyes that were quite as wistful, she gave him an



LERIDA.

appealing, imploring glance which seemed to say that she would be saved from her present fate.

For an instant we trembled. The case was so hopeless. There was the dividing screen. There was the nun on guard beyond the closed door. There was the drenching rain outside. An escape in

a deluge would not have been romantic—and where could they escape to? It was one of those agonizing moments of helplessness that sometimes drive men mad.

H. C. grasped the screen. There was an instant when we thought he would have torn it down *coûte que coûte*. He looked reckless and desperate and miserable. Then we placed our hand on his arm as we had done that night at the opera in Gerona, and he calmed down under the mesmeric influence.

We turned to leave the chapel. As we did so, a louder bell rang out, the door opened, and in walked the Mother-Superior (if such she were) at the head of her little army of novices.

They quickly grouped themselves round the altar, moving in utter silence, like phantoms, and subsided into graceful attitudes, apparently absorbed in devotion. The sight was as charming as it was painful: for who could say how many of these young girls were voluntarily renouncing the world, or in the least realised what they were doing?

Before passing out, we gave a last look at this angelic vision. Quiet as we were we did not move exactly like phantoms. The meaning of our slight stir penetrated beyond the screen. It was too great a temptation for the fair young novice we have described. She felt that her last hope was dissolving, and she turned towards H. C. with a gaze that would have moved a stone.

Fortunately his eyes were buried in his handkerchief, or it is certain that we should never have left the chapel in the state in which we found it. The screen would have gone; the Mother-Superior defied, there would have been rout and consternation, the alarm bell rung, and perhaps—who knows?—a priest would have appeared upon the scene and married this young and romantic Romeo and Juliet. The novices would have turned into bridesmaids, and the Mother-Superior have given away her spiritual daughter. A lovely transformation scene indeed! Slighter currents have before now changed the course of nations.

The door closed upon us without tragic event or catastrophe. Through the deluge we waded to the hotel.

The long dining-room was now empty. The waiter brought us coffee and cognac, which we ordered to restore H. C.'s nervous system; we paid our bill which was by no means as modest as the pretensions of the inn; and under the faithful and unfailing pilotage of Sebastien, we departed for the railway station. The poor fellow looked melancholy.

"Oh, señor," he cried, "I wish you were going to stay a week. I did hope you would be here for at least four days."

"The fates forbid!" we cried, horrified at the bare thought. "A week here in such weather would make one desperate, Sebastien. Remember that we have no fair Lucia here to turn all our thistles to roses, these dull streets into an earthly paradise."

Sebastien sighed. "To-morrow the sun will shine, señor," he said. "You would not know Manresa again under a blue sky."

"But our friend Telemaque declares the rainy season has begun," we returned. "This deluge is to last many days, if not weeks, Sebastien."

"It is a mistake," said Sebastien. "We have no rainy season. You will see that to-morrow there will be no rain, no clouds. Then if you had stayed, I am sure you would have spoken to the padrone for me, and got him to promote me to the dining-room. And then we could have been married."

Sebastien like everyone else, was building his castles and dreaming his dreams; and it certainly caused us a slight regret that we could not help to lay them on a solid foundation. All we could do was to give him our best wishes, and tell him that if sufficiently earnest and persevering he would certainly gain the desire of his heart. It only depended on himself.

This prophecy seemed to inspire him with hope and courage; and our last reminiscence of Manresa was that of a young man, strong, handsome and fresh coloured, standing hat in hand on the platform, and begging us "with tears in his voice" to stay at least two days in Manresa the next time we passed that way and formally petition the landlord in a deputation of one for his promotion.*

No sooner had we left than the rain ceased, and though the sky remained grey, the clouds lifted.

As far as Cervera the country we passed through was evidently picturesque, and only wanted the contrast of sun and shade to make it charming. Conspicuous amidst the landscape for many and many a long mile was the wonderful mountain of Montserrat with its peaks and pinnacles, about which the white mists still rolled and wrapped themselves. The scenery was diversified by many a wild ravine, where tangled bushes grew over the hard rock; many a fertile vale rich in fruit trees, in cork trees, pines, olives and oaks, intermixed their various shades of green. Beyond Cervera, the country was cold and barren and abounded in rock-strewn plains, to which the grey skies gave a still more sad and sombre tone. We approached Lerida when the shades of night were falling, and could just discern its grand outlines rising out of the great plain. These seemed to yield in

* If the reader feels any interest in Sebastien, he will be glad to hear that a petition sent to the landlord in the form of a letter proved as effective as the proposed deputation. He was promoted to the dignity (and fees) of second waiter in the dining-room: and on the 1st of last May was united to his beloved Lucia. The sun shone and the skies were blue; the world smiled upon the young couple. The bride in her white veil and pale silk dress (the gift of her late employer, Madame la Modiste) must have appeared ravishing; and few bridegrooms in Manresa could have looked handsomer or more manly than Sebastien. We can imagine how his face beamed, his eyes sparkled, his heart overflowed. His master—not to be outdone by Madame la Modiste—gave them a wedding breakfast, and the walls rang with the shouts that went up when the health of the happy pair was drunk. One can only wish them the serene bliss and success they deserve.

interest only to Manresa, whilst the town itself proved far more attractive.

We found the place sufficiently civilised to possess an omnibus, which transported us bag and baggage to the hotel. The long straight thoroughfare in which we found ourselves looked in the darkening night like the fag end of a village, unfinished and unpaved; almost like the street of some far away Colonial settlement. It was wide, and lined with trees, and beyond the trees on one side, a row of large houses. Amongst them was our inn, a rambling, cheerless sort of building, too new to be peopled with ghosts or distinguished by artistic outlines. Anything more opposite to the ghostly element could not be imagined. Still, in spite of frightful drawbacks, it was some degrees better than Manresa.

We were conducted by an ancient but amiable duenna to a large lofty sitting room with a bedroom opening on each side: evidently the state apartments. The place looked empty and neglected, and our candles hardly lighted up the obscurity. The electric bells were all broken, and we soon found that if we rang till doomsday, no one appeared.

Our duenna was toothless and apparently voiceless, for when she opened her capacious mouth and began to talk, no sound came forth. The mouth worked up and down in absolute silence, and the effect was creepy and peculiar. It almost felt as though a mummy had been galvanised into life minus the voice. Her costume had nothing redeeming about it. A sort of impromptu turban was placed over a shock head of hair. Her petticoats were of the shortest, and revealed feet and ankles that would have supported a substantial Dutch vrow. We afterwards found that she was the laundress of the establishment, and that this was the costume in which she presided at the washtub. She smiled sweetly upon H. C. and her face looked like a huge, amiable cavern. He, with an imagination full of the lovely face of that young novice in Manresa, shuddered, dropped into the furthest chair, and begged us to complete the arrangements without him.

There was nothing to arrange, and the Gorgon soon withdrew with her cavernous smiles and voiceless words. Then from a distant corner we heard an anxious murmur: "What about dinner?" H. C. had not expired; the Gorgon had evidently not frightened away all earthly needs.

Fortunately dinner was forthcoming, though when we had finally settled down and removed the stains of travel, and H. C. had recovered his nerves, the night was growing apace. We plunged into wide passages, and after half a dozen wrong turnings at length found ourselves in the dining-room, large, lofty and well lighted. The chef sent up a civilised bill of fare, and the landlord waited upon us himself; whilst under the influence of fortifying dishes and refined wines the charms of the Manresa novice faded into the back-



LERIDA. ONE OF THE OLD GATEWAYS.

ground, and H. C. felt almost equal to challenging the Lerida Gorgon to single combat as a libel upon her sex. We were conducted back to our rooms by quite a procession, including the thin landlord and stout landlady, headed by the Gorgon bearing a flambeau.

Once on our balcony, we found the night had changed for the better. Clouds had disappeared, stars shone, the trees before us were rustling gently in the wind, and calmness and repose had fallen upon the world. It was past ten o'clock; the place seemed as still and deserted as a city of the dead; not a sound broke the silence, and we went forth for a night study of Lerida.

It was intensely dark. Here and there an oil lamp glimmered, making darkness visible. Presently we found ourselves—we hardly knew how—on the bridge, looking down upon the waters of the river, that run so closely to the town as to reflect its outlines. To-night it was too dark to reflect anything excepting, here and there, a faint track of light thrown by a distant star. The surface was not disturbed by boats or any sort of craft.

To the right rose the houses of the town, and above them faint and shadowy against the night sky, the outlines of the wonderful old cathedral, perched on its rock 300 feet above the town itself.

We tried to reach it, climbing and stumbling up the narrow ill-paved thoroughfares, that seemed to wind and twist about like the contortions of a snake. The darkness might be felt. There was not a solitary light to guide our feet, and every now and then we found ourselves charging a dead wall as Don Quixote charged the windmills.

Once H. C. plunged against the door of a low cottage, and before he could turn round there rushed out a demon in light attire with a torrent of hard words and a still harder blunderbus-sort of weapon. It was fortunate for H. C. that a dog also rushed out at the moment—between the man's legs, bringing him to the ground, where he and his blunderbus lay motionless. All the dogs in the neighbourhood set up a howl and a bark, and the place was fast turning to pandemonium.

We were evidently on dangerous ground. Strangers were not expected here, and were not made welcome. We heard doors open above us and voices inquiring who passed that way so late. Our lives were in jeopardy amongst these wild Catalonians, howbeit they have not the sword-and-dagger temperament of the more impulsive Spaniards. We had fallen amongst thieves. Discretion being the better part of valour, we glided back like phantoms, passing safely through the ranks of the enemy, and found ourselves on the great square which is the market-place, and where we breathed freely.

No one followed in pursuit. It seemed as though, their own territories abandoned, they cared nothing what became of intruders. Presently the dogs ceased to bark, silence once more fell upon the night. We hoped our friend of the blunderbus had not been

seriously wounded, but under the circumstances it was impossible to make anxious inquiries.

It was difficult to get even a faint impression of the town. Here and there we caught a vision of promising arcades, and apparently ancient outlines of houses and gabled roofs, but everything was in tenebrous gloom. Hardly a single window reflected the faintest ray; the streets were deserted. Only from a solitary café came forth, as we passed, a small band of some half dozen men, who quietly went up a side street and disappeared. It was only a little past eleven, but the people of Lerida were wise and knew nothing of midnight oil, and wasting energies, and burning the candle at both ends.

"We are doing no good," said H. C. whose head had been rather bruised by coming into contact with doors and walls in the narrow lane. "I think it would be as well to follow the example of these people and retire, reserving our energies for to-morrow. In this darkness we might charge another cottage-door without a friendly dog to deliver us from an avenging blunderbus."

So we turned back in the long narrow street of which Lerida seemed chiefly composed, and presently found ourselves in the broad hotel avenue.

In the very centre of it was an old watchman with his staff and lantern. He threw his light upon us as we approached, then gave a "Good-evening" and turned down the spear of his staff in token of friendliness.

We thought we recognised both face and voice. Where had we met?

"You are late out, gentlemen," he said. "It grows towards midnight. In a few minutes I must call out the hour and the weather. The people of Lerida are even earlier than those of Burgos, where I was watchman until six months ago."

Then the mystery was explained. This was the very old watchman who had piloted us to the hotel the night we had lost ourselves in that most uncomfortable of Spanish towns, with the worst of Spanish inns.

"And have you forgotten us?" we said. "Do you not remember taking two strangers through the streets of Burgos more than a year ago, and seeing them safely to their very door?"

The watchman put down his lantern deliberately and struck the ground with his spear. "Is it possible, señor!" he cried. "Santa Maria! A plague upon my memory and eyesight! But the night is dark, and my lantern for some reason burns dim. Indeed I remember it well. Can I ever forget your largesse on that occasion? I have often wondered how you fared in Spain and where you wandered. Often wished I might meet you again."

"But what brings you here?" we asked. "Surely Burgos is more important than Lerida, and you have progressed backwards. This hardly looks like promotion."

"Oh, señor, there is no promotion for us poor watchmen. One town is much the same as another. I earn as much in Lerida as I did in Burgos, and the saints know that either pays little enough."

"Were you then sent here for any special reason?"

"A reason of my own, señor. My wife's old parents live here, and she wanted to be near them; so I petitioned to come here, and it was granted. On the whole I am better off than in Burgos."

After some further conversations, and with a substantial remembrance for Auld Lang Syne, we left the old watchman, and turned for our hotel.

We soon felt almost as lost as in that past time at Burgos. The houses were all exactly alike. Every light was out, every door closed. There was no especial lamp to indicate which was the inn, and we could discover neither sign nor name. At last in the darkness we managed to trace on a lamp, in small characters, the words *Fonda de España*. The great door beneath it was shut, like every other door: but there was a ponderous knocker, to which we directed our energies.

It was all in vain, for no one responded. Knock after knock brought forth no result. The echoes we woke in the avenue were enough to waken the dead. Our watchman had gone to the far end, and by the gleam of his lamp we saw him turn and hasten towards us. The habitable part of the inn was upstairs, a league of passages separated it from the outer door. If every one was in bed and fast asleep, we might knock away until daybreak.

We were growing seriously concerned, when just as our old friend the watchman arrived upon the scene, up rushed another functionary in a state of breathless agitation. This we found was the night porter of the hotel, and he carried great keys in his hand.

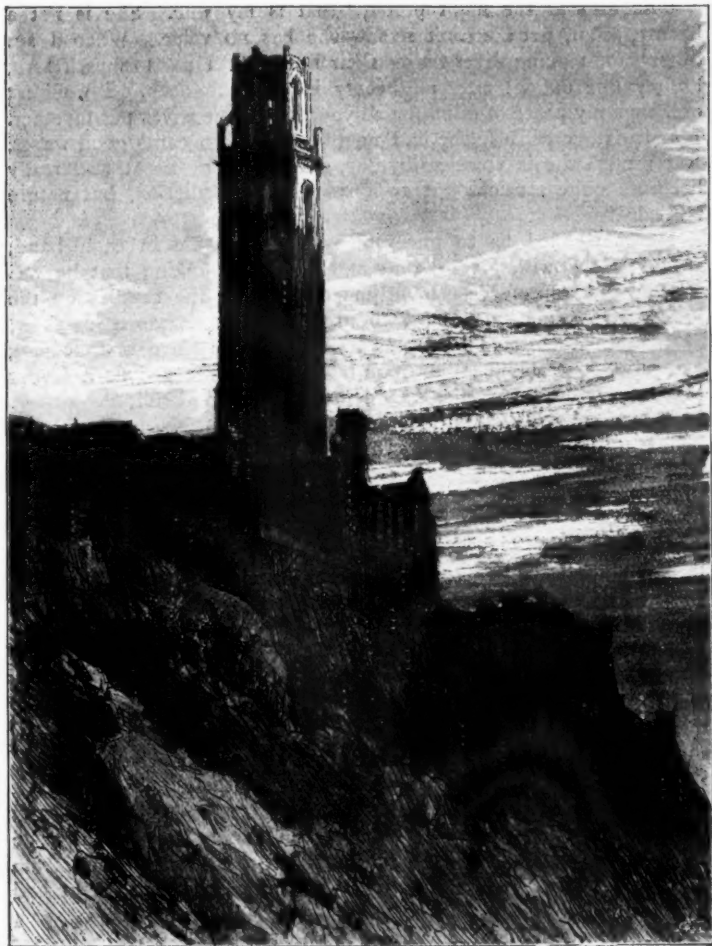
"A thousand pardons, gentlemen," he began, as far as want of breath would allow him. "I did not know any one was out and I went for a short walk, just to breathe the midnight air and contemplate the stars. I heard you knocking when quite a mile away. You have indeed the strength of Hercules. And there is also something peculiar in this knocker. You may hear it all over the town, but you cannot hear it in the hotel, unless you are in the porter's lodge. It has been said that the house is bewitched, and I think it is; for once when the Bishop breakfasted here, as soon as he entered the doors, a loud report was heard and the place trembled, just as if some evil spirit were frightened and was departing in a flash. If you only knew how I ran when I heard the knocker, you would pity me."

"I guessed what was up," said our watchman, "but I waited, thinking you would be sure to arrive. You are too fond of leaving your post, Johan, and one of these days your post will leave you."

This he thought highly probable, but the porter merely shrugged his shoulders, intimating that if he lost one place another would turn

up. He applied one of the great keys to the lock, and the door rolled open.

We passed into a dark passage which rather reminded us of the



OLD CATHEDRAL, LERIDA.

gloomy entrance to the hospederia at Montserrat. Upstairs every one had gone to bed, and they had not even left us a light. But for the night porter we must have sat all night upon the chairs. When the candles threw out a faint illumination, H. C. looked round

shudderingly as though he expected to see the Gorgon lurking in some corner.

We had found out that this extraordinary creature rejoiced in the charming name of *Rose*, and mentioned the name aloud.

"Rose," said the night porter, "that is my wife. She is not a beauty, señor, but she can't scold—she has no voice. When I see other good-looking wives rating their husbands I say to myself 'Ah, ha, my fine fellow! after all beauty is only skin-deep. I wouldn't exchange my peace of mind for all your handsome wives put together. I married her because she had no voice and also earns good wages. But though she is voiceless by day, she snores by night, and really becomes quite musical. It is a singular contradiction, but nature is freaky.'"

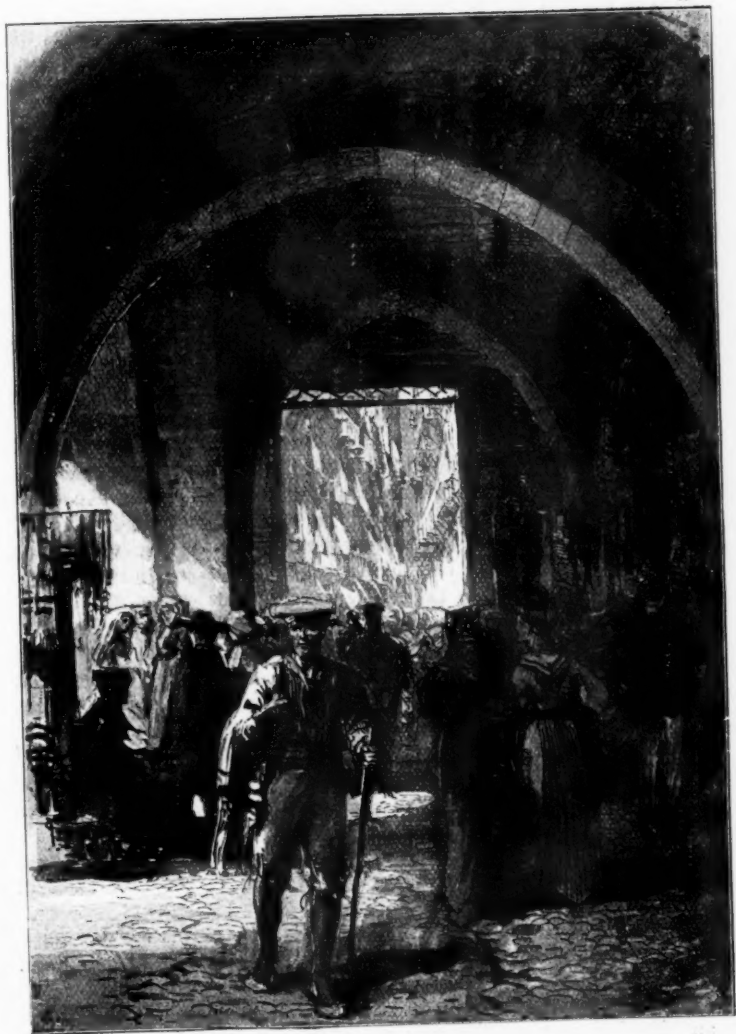
He marshalled us to our rooms with a candle in each hand, striding along with great dignity and evidently thinking that he was the life and soul of the establishment. Putting the candles on the sitting-room table, he backed towards the door, made a low bow, once more apologised for being absent without leave and keeping us beating a midnight tattoo upon the door, and begged as a favour that we would not mention the circumstance to the landlord.

This we readily promised, and as it was utterly impossible to maintain any sort of gravity on the occasion, the night porter, wishing us refreshing slumbers, departed in great peace of mind—probably, since midnight had struck, for an early morning walk. We heard his receding footsteps, and the house sank into repose.

The next morning there was not a cloud in the sky. Our study in grey had given place to much more positive tones. H. C.'s rainy season had been a pure effort of the imagination. Sebastien was right after all, and in sheer gratitude we sat down and penned such an epistle to his master as would have moved a heart of stone. We represented in glowing colours the happiness of the young pair that a word from him could make or mar; we enlarged upon the moral question of conferring pleasure where it was possible, and we wound up with a rash assertion, almost an undertaking, that Sebastien would prove a tower of strength to the well-being of the hotel. The result of that epistle has been duly recorded.

We rose early. With that glorious sun shining who could waste moments in sleep? Presently we heard a sort of alarmed shout from H. C. and on going into the sitting-room, and asking him how he had slept, we found him pale and agitated—and confronted by the Gorgon.

She looked if anything more terrible than last night. Her cavernous mouth was wide open, but no sound came forth, though her capacious jaws moved up and down and her eyes rolled about in a fine frenzy. Her sleeves were tucked up above the elbow revealing a muscular arm that would not have disgraced a prize-fighter. She was evidently primed for another field day at the wash-tub. When we went in she was smiling sweetly upon H. C.



ARCADES, LERIDA.

"What does it all mean?" we asked. "Surely you have not been offering to elope with the Gorgon?"

"I simply want my boots," said H. C. unromantically. "I rang away at the bell just as we knocked at the door last night, and with the same result. The place *must* be bewitched. Then I opened the door and clapped my hands, and the Gorgon suddenly sprang out upon me from a dark cupboard close to the door, right into my very arms. I nearly had a fit of convulsions. And now when I ask for my boots all she does is to mouthe and shake her head. What's to be done? Is it a plot to keep us here for good? Have we fallen into the hands of Philistines?"

Our own toilet being in a more advanced stage than H. C.'s we marched forth in search of the landlord on what we hoped would not prove a bootless errand. He was in his counting-house, counting out his money—and arranging his dinners. On making anxious inquiries we discovered that in Lerida boot-cleaning was considered one of the fine arts. There was a Boot-cleaner in Ordinary to the town, who took the inns in turn and was paid according to his work. People had to wait his pleasure. That morning he had not yet arrived; we had risen early.

Fortunately he appeared at the moment: an old, greyheaded man with a fine presence, who looked almost past boot-cleaning or any other occupation. We found him a man quite above his humble employment. He was a Frenchman by birth, but had lived in Spain for nearly seventy years—he was now verging on ninety, and his old wife, he told us, was eighty-seven, and two years ago had gone blind. He had not forgotten his native language which he still spoke with a very pure accent. In his last days he was supporting himself and his old wife by cleaning boots. It was the custom of the town. The hotels would do anything for you but clean boots. As far as he was concerned he just managed to keep the wolf from the door, and that after all was all they wanted.

He went off to his task, and when we returned to H. C. we found him much comforted before an empty tray of rolls and coffee, our own share as well as his having disappeared, whilst the Gorgon had departed to charm other realms.

In due time the old man arrived with his boots, was duly paid for his work, and we presently found ourselves under the blue skies of Lerida.

A greater contrast than Lerida by night and Lerida by day could not be imagined: and last night had by no means prepared us for the charms of to-day.

Little as one hears of it, it is the second city in Catalonia, with an historical and eventful past that has submitted to constant wars and sieges. In the far-off days it was occupied by the Romans, and the present bridge is built on Roman foundations. It was held by Pompey in the first century B.C. and these were unsettled times

for Lerida—or Ilerda, as it was then called. In very early days it became a university town, but so little esteemed that the students of Rome were sent here when rusticated. As the centuries rolled on it grew in favour, though the trail of the rusticated Romans must have remained upon it, for two of its most famous students were Vicenti Ferrer the terrible inquisitor and Calixtus III. the wicked pope.

The Goths had much to do with Lerida, and in 546 it became a Bishopric. It fell under the influence of the Moors, but was destroyed by the French at the end of the eighth century.

For the next 400 years little is heard of Lerida; but in 1150 it was restored by Ramon Berenguer, and quickly became popular and important. In the seventeenth century during the great Catalonian revolt, Lerida chose Louis XIII. for its king; upon which Philip IV. came down upon them, and defeated La Mothe, causing him to raise the siege. Four years afterwards, in 1644, the French again tried to take it but were again defeated. The Grand Condé opened another siege, and caused a number of violins to play before the town to encourage his soldiers. But this also had the effect of encouraging the brave Gregorio Brito, the Portuguese Governor, who sallied forth with his army, silenced the fiddlers and put the French to the rout.

In the War of Succession Lerida was again besieged by the French, who behaved with great treachery and cruelly sacked the town after capitulation. The *quid-pro-quo* came in 1710, when Stanhope routed Philip V. at Almenara. The French fled before the English bayonets, and Philip himself, in these early days of his long reign, nearly lost his life. He would have been spared many troubles.

A little later on, in 1810, during the Peninsular War, it was taken by Suchat, and the inhabitants men, women and children were treated with such cruelty that the governor unable to bear the sight of so much suffering, capitulated. Since then Lerida has enjoyed more or less tranquil days. She would now hardly be thought worth taking.

It was during some of these troublous times, in 1707 that her beautiful cathedral was desecrated, and remains to this day a prominent illustration of the barbarities of war. It towers 300 feet above the town, a magnificent outline against the clear blue sky. The first church existed here as far back as the 6th century. This in time gave place to the present church of which the first stone was laid by Pedro II. in 1203. It is one of the finest specimens of the early-pointed style in Europe and its desecration was a world's regret. Nevertheless, it is a little contradictory, for the windows are for the most part round-headed.

Perched on the very summit of its almost perpendicular rock, it looks even higher and larger than it really is. Its fine octagonal steeple stands out a bold and conspicuous object over many a mile of plain and country. As the sun declines its shadow falls upon the

houses of the town sleeping below, and creeps over the surface of the river. Near it is a building now used as a powder magazine, but in the middle ages was a palace given up to the rude scenes of splendour of which those days were typical, and before that it had been a Moorish castle and a Christian temple. Its walls have defied the centuries, but nothing is left of its Moorish beauty and refinement.

In 1707 the French turned the great church into a fortress, and it was never restored to its sacred uses. Peace fell upon Lerida, but the fat old canons had learned to shirk the steep climb up the rock in all seasons and weathers. They agitated for a new cathedral within the town, and had their wish. A new and hideous Corinthian building arose, and the magnificent church upon the hill after 500 years of faithful service was shorn of its glory.

Yet its outlines are as fine and as striking as ever; and the columns and stonework and tracery that remain, still bear witness to its ancient splendour. It is, however, with the greatest difficulty that admission is obtained, a foolish piece of tyranny. The interior is to the last degree interesting to the lover of ancient architecture, and there are no military or other secrets to be carried away. But say what one will, courtesy is not one of the virtues of the Spanish, and in this matter the Catalonians perhaps take the lead. They are abrupt and uncivil, and unwilling to stir hand or foot to oblige you unless there is something to be gained by it.

On sallying forth this morning we had these magnificent outlines in full view. We have said that the tenebrous darkness of last night had not prepared us for the charms of to-day. We found Lerida one of the most interesting of Spanish towns. This morning it was full of life and movement. The market-place was crowded with buyers and sellers; men and women still wearing a certain amount of picturesque costume. The air seemed full of sound. The fruit and flower-stalls were splendid, and large quantities of each could be bought for a very small sum.

As we had discovered last night, the town consisted of one long street running parallel with the river. It was narrow and straggling, full of lights and shadows. Now and then you came upon short arcades that were singularly picturesque, whilst every here and there a fine old gateway led to the river-side. These gateways form part of the fortifications of the town, for Lerida is strongly protected.

Making way through this long street, we presently came upon a wine-pressing machine in the very middle of the road, worked by strong and stalwart men; a very southern and picturesque scene. We watched them pile up the grapes, that had already once been pressed, until the machine was full. Then adjusting it by means of long poles they turned the press and the rich red grape-juice poured itself into a vat placed for the purpose. The air was full of the scent of muscatel. The men looked as though the red juice ran in their veins and filled them with undue energy.

As the vat filled, it was emptied with a great ladle into a larger barrel that stood inside the archway of the adjoining house. The sight was novel and the men seemed amused at our interest. They offered us of the juice in a small vessel, declaring it excellent; but there was a suspicious want of cleanliness about the whole thing—it might have been fancy to a large extent—and we civilly declined the attention: upon which—possibly to set us a good example—they emptied the vessel themselves, smacked their lips and pronounced it very good.

Narrow streets led upwards from the main street to the old cathedral, a steep and rough climb. It was a place to revel in, full



LERIDA MULES.

of wonderful perspectives and artistic groupings, as much the result of accident as of purpose. The eye was arrested by a bewildering accumulation of wrought-iron balconies, of casements and sunblinds, all sparkling in sunshine and shadow, whilst above one could trace a long succession of ancient gabled roofs, clear cut against the blue sky, the projecting water-spout of every house looking like a grinning gargyle and adding so much to the quaint antiquity of the place. Through the old gates we watched the mules passing in their rich and curious trappings.

Very distinctly we felt that Lerida was a revelation and a discovery; a town by no means to be passed over when searching out the Romance of Spain.

We found the narrow thoroughfare in which last night we had almost come to grief. It was so winding and tortuous and ill-paved, we wondered how we had escaped destruction. Here and there small houses of the meanest description broke the continuity of dead grey walls. At the door of the cottage H. C. had charged sat an evil-looking dog who growled and showed his teeth as we passed and evidently connected us with last night's midnight raid. Whether the owner of the blunderbus had killed himself with his own weapon or was only absent on business remained uncertain; he did not appear.

Continuing upwards we presently came out upon the open space surrounding the old Cathedral.

The precincts were certainly not ecclesiastical. We seemed to have reached the poorest part of the town, and the houses were quite picturesque in their shabbiness. A splendid doorway admitted to the interior of the semi-religious fortress, and before this a sentinel with gun and bayonet kept watch and ward. No one passed him without a special permission of the churlish old commandant of the town, who, after tracing your pedigree back to William the Conqueror, bestowed the simple favour as though conferring upon you the dignity of Spain's high order of the Saint Esprit.

Strangers and especially Englishmen, evidently visit Lerida at long intervals, and wherever we went we found ourselves attracting an amount of remark and attention that might have confused more bashful minds. As in most other places, the people were especially interested in our little kodak camera, and seemed to think the honour of being taken equal to canonisation. In the market-place men and women threw themselves into groups and attitudes, set out their stalls to the best advantage, and begged the favour of being made immortal.

But as the day wore on the crowd dispersed and disappeared; the market-place grew empty, the arcades lost their loungers; the afternoon shadows lengthened; there were not so many sunflashes in the air; the outlines mellowed as the sky behind them grew less dazzling; the river lost some of its jewels.

We were gazing at the latter, at the wonderful outlines of the town rising gradually upon its rock, crowned by that magnificent fortress with its imposing and impressive tower, when a voice suddenly said beside us: "We hope, señor, you have spent a happy day in Lerida and seen the interior of the old Cathedral—now nothing but a useless barrack. The commandant suffers from dyspepsia and is capricious. No one ever knows beforehand whether he will grant permission or withhold it. It entirely depends upon his digestion."

We turned and saw our Boot-cleaner in Ordinary standing meekly and humbly beside us. Noting his fine face—it was really dignified in spite of his office—his white hair, his nearly ninety years, we thought the meekness and humility should have been on our side.

"How is it that you, a Frenchman, come to be living on Spanish ground?" we asked.

"Ah, señor thereby hangs a tale. If I am to give you my reason, I must go back nearly seventy years in my life, for it dates from that time. And that, you see, will take us very nearly to the days of Waterloo. All my people were respectable and well-to-do and some even distinguished: there was a good and prosperous life before me. I was in the French army, serving my time. I had been unfortunate and drawn a low number in conscription; besides which, soldiers were wanted and few escaped. Napoleon in devastating other countries had not spared his own. It was then that I committed the one great folly of my life, which has ever since been one of repentance. I fell in love with a beautiful Spanish girl; so madly, so desperately, that I think for the time being I lost the balance of my mind. Every consideration faded before the strength of my passion. This beautiful girl seemed equally in love with me. I was young, they told me I was good-looking, and in my uniform I daresay I was not unattractive. Then I committed my one great folly. I obtained a week's leave of absence, and deserted. We fled together to her own country, and of course I became an outlaw. I sacrificed home and country and honour; I ruined all my worldly prospects; and for what? For a pair of bewitching eyes. Nay, she had more than that; she was a good woman and has made me a good wife; but had she been twice favoured, my folly would have been equally great. For years and years I was possessed of a fever—that of *mal du pays*: all I had deliberately thrown away gained a hundred-fold in charm, haunted my mind by day, coloured my dreams. But there was no place for repentance. Now it has all passed away. Señor, my great nephew is a French count, rich and well spoken of, one of the high ones of the land. He does not even know of my existence. Life has only one thing left for me—death! But I pray that I may live to close the sightless eyes of my wife, and then follow her speedily, that we may rest in one grave."

"Has your wife been long blind?" we asked in sympathy.

"Only two years, señor. You would not know it to look at her. In spite of her eighty-seven years, her eyes, are still soft and bright, but they are closed to the world. I have now not only to earn the daily bread, but to buy it and manage the household. We have many good neighbours who help the old couple, and look in upon the wife when I am at work. Ah, señor, it is delightful to find one to whom I can talk in my own tongue. Surely the señor is French too?"

"It is the land of our birth," we confessed; "nevertheless we are English, and would not be otherwise."

The old man hesitated; we saw there was something upon his mind; it came out at last.

"Would the señor deign to come and see the wife, and talk to

her a little of France and the French? She still speaks it perfectly, and she too has often longed for the country and the privileges that for her sake I threw away. Such a visit would colour the rest of her remaining days. It is but a few steps."

Who could resist such an appeal? We turned and accompanied the patriarch, who in spite of his nearly 90 years, still walked with a certain amount of vigour. We thought the few steps grew into a good many, as the old man passed under the gateway and turned to the left down the long narrow street.

Soon we reached the spot where we had watched the grape-pressing. The men were giving up work, and clearing all away, leaving nothing behind them but the stains of the fruit and the scent of the muscatel. They nodded in friendly recognition, and we knew that the laugh they gave meant to say that the cup we had refused they had found very cheering. The narrow street was growing dim, and in the arched room, half cellar, half wine vault, they had lighted candles. The semi-obscurity was weird and picturesque in the extreme, almost Rembrandt-like in effect. The men's faces were thrown up against the dark background as the light fell upon them; and as one of them sitting astride a barrel raised a cup to his lips, he looked a true disciple of Bacchus.

Our guide passed on and turning up a narrow street halted before the door of a quaint old house. The street was quiet and respectable; the house looked clean and well cared for, in spite of its age.

"We have lived here for a quarter of a century and more—twenty-seven years," said the old man, "and the house does not look a day older than it looked then. Ah, señor," with a sigh, "we cannot say the same of ourselves. Twenty-seven years in a lifetime make all the difference between youth and age. But let us mount. My wife does not expect you, but you will find her ready to receive the young king himself if he paid her a visit."

We passed up a broad old staircase of solid oak, that would almost have graced a palace. In days gone by, this house, fallen to a low estate, must have had an important destiny. The walls were panelled. There was a refined and imposing air about the place. We would have given worlds for the ability to transport the fine old staircase to an English home.

The old man mounted to the topmost floor, and knocked at a large old oak door which well matched the staircase. A voice responded, he lifted the latch and we walked in.

"I bring you visitors, Nerissa," said the old man. "A gentleman from France, who will talk to you in our beautiful language, and tell you of scenes and places you have not looked upon for nearing seventy years. You were only eighteen, I was only twenty when we turned our backs for ever upon la belle Normandie."

It was a sight worth seeing. The room was large and airy, quaint and old as the rest of the house. The light came in through large



WINE PRESSERS, LERIDA.

casements with latticed panes that bore the unmistakable seal of time. The room itself was in perfect and spotless order. In a large alcove stood the bed, neatly draped and curtained. What furniture the room contained matched its surroundings. There was an utter absence of any commonplace element about it.

But it was not all this that distinguished it so singularly. It was the figure of a little old woman seated near the latticed panes in an arm-chair. The evening light, still strong in the west, fell upon her. As we entered she did not move, but turned her sightless eyes towards us, with that intent, listening look that is so pathetic. She was very small, and looked almost like a fairy queen. Her hair was white as snow, but still abundant and faultlessly arranged. The face was small and refined, and possessed all the beauty of age, just as in years gone by it must have possessed in a very marked manner all the beauty of youth. It had the placid look the blind so often wear. The face had evidently been fair—was still fair. There was a delicate flush upon it, and it was without line or wrinkle. This was very strange in one who must have had, to some extent at least, a hard and laborious life, with many anxieties. Her dress was neatness itself; an old dark silk probably given to her by a rich visitor whose turn it had served; and it was worn with the air that seemed to betoken one who had been a lady. But her whole appearance and bearing was that of a gentlewoman. It was a perfect and faultless picture, charming to look upon.

We turned to the old man in wonder. His eyes were fixed upon his wife with an intensity of admiration and reverence almost startling. It was evident that the love of youth had survived every trial and drawback, all life's rough lessons. So far he could have nothing to regret. The folly of which he had been guilty—and it was an undoubted folly and mistake—had been condoned and excused by the after life.

"We no longer marvel that you deserted the ranks of the army for those of a sweeter service," we said, looking from one to the other, and feeling that we gazed upon a wonderful idyll.

"Was she not worth it—even all I renounced!" he cried. "Nerissa, I have told these gentlemen all my boyish folly and indiscretion—all you made me give up for your bewitching eyes."

Quite a youthful flush passed over the old lady's face, as she smiled rather sadly in response.

"It was indeed much to renounce for me," she said, in a very sweet voice. "I was not worth it; no woman could be worth it. I ought never to have permitted it, and the thought has been one of the keenest sorrows of my life. But we act first and think after. Though after all, what I renounced was equally great."

"We are quite sure that you would do it all over again," we said. "You do not in the least regret it, and your life has been a very happy one."

Again the youthful flush passed over the old lady's face. She put out her hand—a small, delicate hand—as though searching for her husband's. He had soon clasped it.

"*Nerissa*, you do not regret anything," he said. "You know quite well you would do it all over again if we could go back to the beginning of life."

Her sightless but still wonderfully expressive eyes looked up into his face.

"With you, *Alphonse*, to tempt me, how could I resist?" she returned. "Alas, human nature is weak where the heart is concerned."

"Have you any children?" we asked.

"We have four, señor," replied the old lady. "And grandchildren. I am even a great-grandmother. Our children are all out in the world, and not one of them lives in *Lerida*. As far as I could I brought them up well, and tried to give them a little bearing and refinement. But we have always been poor, and poverty means limitation. They are all prospering, but in fairly humble life. At rare intervals one or the other pays us a visit; but time flies quickly and they are soon gone again."

And then we talked about France and the French. We happened to know many places in common, and describing what they are to-day, enabled her to realise the vast changes that 70 years had worked. The old lady gave many a sigh.

"*Alphonse*, it is all a new world," she said over and over again. "If we went back to it we should be lost and strange. It is time we passed out of life. But, señor, your visit has brought back a breath of that old life to me. Those who come to us now are humble, and know nothing of our past world. You almost make me feel young again; bring back lost realities, when I was a lady, and had not thrown up all for love, and dreamed not of a humble life of poverty. But, oh, I would renounce it all again a second time for my husband's sake."

Who would have supposed there was such an idyll in the quiet town of *Lerida*? When our Boot-cleaner in Ordinary had come to us that morning and received his humble dole for the work done, who could have imagined that such a romance, such a poem in real life was concealed in his history?

When we went back into the quiet streets the gloom had deepened; twilight reigned; a soft glow was in the evening sky; one or two stars were faintly shining. We could not lose the impression of the visit we had just paid. The wonderful little fairy queen in the arm-chair, who was still ladylike and beautiful and refined in spite of a hard and humble life; and the fine and venerable old man, who for 70 years had remained true and faithful to his first love. No knight of the Round Table could ever have proved more noble and devoted; more worthy of King Arthur's friendship. The very streets of the

town seemed to have gained a charm as we passed through them on our way to the fonda.

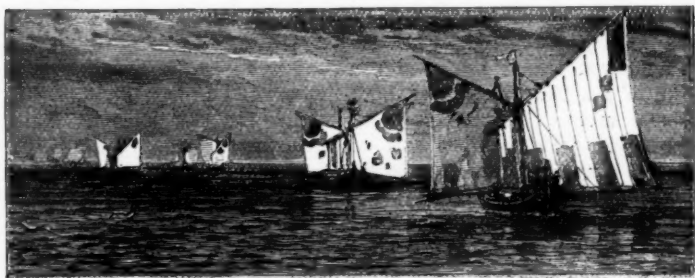
H. C. was singularly quiet and grave. "Of what are you thinking?" we asked.

He started, as if suddenly aroused out of deep thought. "I am thinking," he replied, "of the faithfulness of that beautiful old couple. No, if I tried for a hundred years I never could be as constant as that. In fact I begin to think my only chance of happiness is to emigrate to Salt Lake City and become a Mormon."

"Wait," we returned. "Wait till you are in love. You have never been that yet. Your fancy has been touched often enough, but your heart never. That comes only once in a lifetime."

But H. C. only shook his head and murmured something about having a heart large enough to embrace a whole *Agapemone* of beauty. We did not argue the point, feeling that there are opinions and delusions time alone will put right.

But we went back to the bridge and looked down upon the quiet stream, and beyond the houses of the town to the wonderful outlines of the old cathedral, darkly and distinctly visible against the evening sky. And everything seemed glorified by the story we had just learned, the romance we had witnessed. It was an experience we would not have missed for worlds; and henceforth to us the word *Lerida* would be weighted with a hidden charm of which the interpretation meant everything that was true and chivalrous, everything that was brave and constant, everything that was lovely and of good report.





HIS GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT.

GOOD-BYE, dear; do try and get home as early as you can. It is so dull being here all day alone without a soul to speak to. I shall go round to Mrs. Archer this morning, and have a chat with her, I think. And perhaps Mrs. Milton will come and have tea with me in the afternoon."

She talked him out of the dining-room when he rose from his half-finished breakfast; she talked him down the hall to the front door, while he took his hat and stick

and tried to make his escape; and as he walked down the street her voice still followed him and rang in his ears.

Two years ago Jack Trevor had married Norah Blake. It had been a love-match on both sides. Norah's bright vivacity and charming prattle had fascinated the rather grave and serious Jack. Before the honeymoon was over, the charming prattle had palled upon him. He loved Norah as much as ever, she was such a pretty, sweet-tempered, loving little woman, but he began to dread the sound of her voice. A little later it got upon his nerves. Now he listened to her ceaseless chatter with an irritation that seemed to grow every day more unbearable. He walked down to the Underground Station in a very fever of impatience.

"I believe she will drive me mad. Upon my soul I don't believe I can bear it any longer. Have all women got tongues like that, I wonder?" he thought, as he walked restlessly up and down the platform waiting for his train to come in. So thinking, he remembered a funny little story he had once read in an odd volume of Rabelais. A man had a wife who was tongue-tied and dumb. Getting tired of her eternal silence, he took her to a doctor. The doctor cut the bridle of her tongue, and so gave her speech. When he got her home again, she used her newly-acquired faculty to such good purpose that her husband very soon took her back to the doctor and begged him to restore her dumbness. "We have means of making a woman speak," said the doctor, "but there is nothing in the world can make her hold her tongue. *'Rien pour la faire taire,'*" Jack repeated to himself, and he laughed drearily.

The train came rushing and roaring up to the platform. As he turned the handle of a carriage door, a young girl came hurrying up. He held the door open for her to pass in first; she acknowledged his

courtesy with a silent inclination of her head ; he got in after her and shut the door. She was quietly dressed, not exactly pretty, but with an air of gentle distinction about her. As they rushed into the tunnel, she tried to shut the window at her end of the carriage ; he rose and did it for her, and again she smiled her voiceless thanks. He glanced at her from time to time as she sat quiet and self-possessed in her corner, and a pleasant sense of repose and comfort stole over him. At the fourth station she prepared to get out ; he opened the door for her, and a third time she thanked him silently by a graceful gesture.

He regretted her departure with a quite disproportionate regret. A silent woman ! What an unutterable solace there was in her presence ! How reserved and gentle she had looked with that charm of silence enveloping her. How delicate was the beautiful mouth that could smile without speaking.

He thought of her with a tender regret all that day at his office and forgot some of the nervous irritability that of late had cursed him.

As late as he decently could he went home that evening and became again submerged under the ceaseless flow of his wife's chatter. He had to listen to every word Mrs. Archer had said and to Norah's comments thereon ; to every detail of Mrs. Milton's conversation ; to every peccadillo of the servants ; to every infinitesimal incident of the day from the moment of his departure to his return. He tried to keep the image of that quiet young girl in the train before his mind's eye as a sort of shield against his growing weariness and irritation.

As he walked on to the platform next morning, he saw the girl there before him. His heart gave a great throb and then almost stood still. In his joy and surprise he almost took off his hat to her in greeting. Again he opened the carriage door for her, again he sat in her silent presence with a great rest upon him that was almost reverence.

All that day too the delicious calm of her presence abode with him at his office, followed him home, even made his wife's chatter a shade more endurable.

On the third morning he hastened down to the station full of the thought of meeting the fair unknown. She was not there. He waited till the very last moment holding open the carriage door ready for her in case she should be late, finally letting the train go on without him. He paced the platform debating with himself whether if she did not come he should miss yet another train, or give her up for that day. One moment he felt sure she would come, the next he thought despairingly that he should never see her again, that he had lost her for ever.

Just as the train came in she hurried on to the platform, a little flushed, a little moved out of her wonted sweet calm. She looked at

him with a pleasant air of recognition as they took their places. They had the carriage to themselves as usual. He sat there his mind filled with an ineffable peace, too well content even to regret that their parting was so near. Looking at her quiet face he thought he read in it a wise and strong soul, a mind full of high thoughts and noble aims lifted far above the petty wearing details of ordinary life. "Consuelo," he called her in his own mind, his consolation, his pure and divine Consuelo. He did not want to hear her beautiful thoughts, to have her lovely soul poured out to him in words. It was enough for him to read them all on her thoughtful brow and in her faint subtle smile.

Day by day he idealised her more and more. Every morning they took their short journey together, he rendering such little services as lay in his power, she accepting them always graciously and always in silence. Those few restful moments every morning began to be a power in his life. The growing nervous irritation and impatience, that had threatened to unhinge his mind, fell from him by degrees, leaving him impassible and cold, unconscious almost of his wife's busy tongue and garrulous vivacity.

One evening he saw Consuelo at a concert. He had taken his wife there as he sometimes did; she was sitting beside him very gay and pretty and charmingly dressed, while he listened to the music that in every note spoke to him of Consuelo, when suddenly two or three seats in front of him he saw her. She had an elderly lady with her to whom through all the concert she never spoke one word. Even if Jack had guessed what was indeed the truth, that Consuelo's poor old chaperon was stone deaf, he would not have accepted that as the reason of his lady's divine silence. The exquisite calm that always came upon him in her presence enwrapped him now. The music spoke to his soul of all the beautiful and true and tender thoughts that dwelt in her, behind those quite eyes. They would never need any other interpreter, no closer intercourse could ever reveal them to each other as those strains of music passing between their two souls had done. So Jack sat and dreamed, satisfied with an immeasurable content.

The next morning for the first time he missed her. He waited, letting three trains go without him, then with a sickening heart went on his solitary way to the City. He had never expected this. Never for one moment had he feared that Consuelo would pass out of his life. It had seemed to him that those few sweet moments every morning were as certain, as much to be depended on as the rising of the sun, as his own daily awakening and return to mundane affairs. Next morning he waited several hours at the station, hoping against hope that he should see his Consuelo again. But she never came.

* * * *

Two years dragged their slow length away. Norah's busy tongue was silent where she lay in her grass-grown grave with her baby

beside her. How much of disappointment and heartbreak had lain in the last year of her short married life none can tell. It might be there were some things on which even she could keep silence.

Jack had been alone a year when he again met his Consuelo. This time it was in a fashionable crowded drawing-room at an evening party. She was standing quite near the door when he went in. Seeing their start of mutual recognition their hostess remarked—

“I think you know Mr. Trevor, Mabel?”

Consuelo smiled up into his face with all the old charm.

“Do you remember how often we travelled together in the underground?” he asked, scarcely conscious what he was saying, filled with rapture at the sight of her.

“Oh yes! And I did so want to talk to you, only of course I could not begin first. It seemed such a waste of time to be sitting there opposite each other every morning and never saying a word. I am glad we are introduced to each other at last.”

He cast upon her a curious glance.

“You really wanted to talk?” he asked in a strange voice.

“Of course! You know there is nothing a woman hates so much as to hold her tongue.”

He bowed to her, unable to utter another word, and turned away with a greater bitterness of disappointment and despair in his heart than his life had ever yet known.

TWILIGHT NIGHT.

As one that near the Gate of Hercules

Looks forth at night, and feels a warmer air

Breathe on the heaving darkness; and he sees

White-flaming Sirius climb the southern stair

After Orion and the Pleiades;

And down the west sweet Venus, calm and fair—

A little moon; and warmer comes the breeze—

Comes from the land—and knows the land is there:

So we, on a more restless ocean tossed,

In ship more frail, and in a darker night,

Afraid to trust the chart, the compass lost,

And on the dim horizon never a light—

Yet in the darkness feel an air more bland,

And know the wind is blowing from the Land.

MARY A. M. MARKS.

STORIES OF ANIMALS.*

BY LINDON MEADOWS.

I.—ON THE TRAIL.



"THE coach will be here in ten minutes, sir," said the landlord of the little inn at S—. "Will you walk into the parlour and wait?"

I thanked him, but preferred seating myself, as the day was fine and warm, on my portmanteau by the roadside. Happening to glance presently earthward, I observed a large

body of ants running to and fro, and apparently all in a great state of excitement. Then, on a sudden, at the word of command from their leader (a gigantic specimen of the genus, with a huge head and striking profile) the whole mass became motionless with the exception of eight or ten of the number, who, told off for the purpose, scuttled away in different directions, quartering the ground in the cleverest and most systematic way possible, like a brace of pointers in a barley stubble.

"They are evidently in search of one of their party who has absconded," I said to myself; "either a mutineer, a deserter, a murderer, or a thief—or perhaps an agreeable combination of all four. I will watch for the culprit;" and after a careful diagnosis I saw a frightened fellow galloping along at full speed at about a yard from where I sat. He paused after a time, listened, and looked back to see what progress the enemy were making on his trail, and finding

* This interesting collection of anecdotes has been collected by the Author into a small volume, entitled 'Watched by Wolves,' published by the Victoria Press; and may also be had of Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall & Co., through all booksellers.

that they were gaining upon him fast, he dived in among some pebbles in the hope of evading discovery.

"Stay there, my lad," said I, "while I prop another small stone or two against each side of your *câche* to render it more secure. Don't show yourself on any account, or you are lost;" and he appeared to appreciate my friendly counsel.

On came the scouting party, searching minutely for the fugitive and turning carefully over every likely atom of sand or gravel. Things would have no doubt gone well but for the ill-timed curiosity of my concealed friend, who stupidly, and contrary to my instructions, stuck his head out of the top of the cairn to ascertain how far his ruse was succeeding. In an instant they were upon him, and he was taken, pulled out, and being hurried back to the camp for execution.

It was an amusing, though a painful sight withal to a feeling person like myself, to see the care with which his captors provided against any future attempt at escape, and how they lugged him along, one having him just above the elbow on either side, like a pair of police officers "running in" a pickpocket, and others behind, bundling him neck and crop over any impediment in the path. I had humane thoughts of interfering and giving him another chance for his life, when a horn sounded, and I heard the coachman hoarsely crying, "Now then—this way, sir, if you mean to go along with us!" And that was certainly my object in posing upon that particular spot.

As I am on the subject of ants, I will relate another short story, which will serve to show that, if these wonderful little beings are strict in their administration of justice upon criminals, they are also capable of kind brotherly feeling and practical sympathy and benevolence.

Seated one day, not "at the organ," but upon a garden bench, my attention was called to two ants, one a young and sprightly fellow—call him A.—the other evidently far advanced in years, and blind—call him B. The latter had a fine hair, or some delicate thread or filament about two inches in length, attached to his mouth or head, and A. was holding on by the opposite end of it and leading him tenderly along to his home, or perhaps for an airing. Wishing to see what would be the result of the manœuvre, I took up B., the invalid, with a bit of thin stick and placed him on the top of a tall blade of grass half a yard off, where he waved his antennæ about in a melancholy manner, as if imploring help.

A. was at his wits' end to know what had become of him, and commenced vigorous explorations at once. He searched and researched every likely spot around for several minutes with great patience and perseverance, and being unsuccessful in the quest, moved with compassion, I placed him near the bottom of the blade of grass on which his elderly friend was despondingly seated. He espied him in a moment, cut a droll caper, clambered up in high spirits, and brought him down on his back (I think it was his back) in the same way that Æneas carried off his father Anchises from the

ruins of Troy, and the hair or halter being replaced, away they both trudged again together, as before, to a mossy mound which formed the terminus of their peregrinations.

II.—“DOLCE FAR NIENTE.”

I WITNESSED many droll scenes in New York, but the following, in point of humour, eclipsed all others.

I was lying ill at a boarding-house. My room was on the ground floor, and the broad window looked out immediately upon the avenue of elms in front. It was about the hour of midnight. The full moon, shining down upon the deserted street, lent a radiance almost equal to that of the sun, and I lay watching the gleam of silver glory that shot now and then through the foliage and illuminated the stone pavement beneath.

Presently a respectably-dressed man, wearing the air of one who had been partaking pretty freely of the creature comforts under some friend's hospitable roof, staggered into the shade of the avenue and deposited himself with a ludicrous despatch upon the ground, back to a tree, and facing my window. It was plain that he was in merry pin, for he began to warble a fragment of some bacchanalian song, while his white hat, which was ornamented with a broad black crape band, slid gradually from its proper position downwards to the bridge of his nose. He had not been there long when three city pigs,* who had likewise been spending the evening out and were jogging decently homeward, espied him under the elm, and gathered round. The gentleman, who was evidently a cheerful chirping soul, took their visit in good part, continued to sing, and, as though he had one of the most select audiences possible, waved his hand now to this side, now to that, by way of giving the words of the song a proper effect.

Upon this, one of the pigs, who was of a more poetical temperament than either of his brothers and liked to study character, sat himself down in a lounging way, as one who had fallen in with something that pleased him, and kept up a steady good-natured stare upon the worthy against the tree. The second pig was less of the philosopher. He was for turning the adventure to account, and, thrusting his snout into the bosom of his new and lively acquaintance's waistcoat, seemed to be bent upon searching for his pocket-book and purse; while the third pig, who had grosser tastes still and inherited all the greedy propensities of his fraternity, got possession of the white hat, and, probably with the intention of examining whether it contained anything eatable, plunged his head forcibly into it. The result not being satisfactory to his wishes, he attempted to withdraw himself; but the

* The pigs of New York, as the reader probably knows, were the city scavengers, and allowed to roam about at will.

lining had got over one of his ears, and the effort was not crowned with success. Without imprudently exhausting himself by ineffectual struggles, therefore, or appearing to be in any way disconcerted by the catastrophe, he quietly quitted the company of his friends, and with the white hat fixed gracefully upon his brow and the black band, which had become loosened, streaming out behind him, sauntered demurely away up the middle of the street.

It may have little entertainment for the reader, but to the whimsicality of this scene I believe I am mainly indebted for my speedy recovery from a tedious illness. At all events, I found myself so well the next morning that the doctor said he should call in an hour or two to take me for an airing in his carriage.

Apropos of city pigs, many of the house-windows in New York (the outsides of them, at least) are not cleaned in the ordinary way by a maid with a sponge and wash-leather. A hose is fitted into the street plug-hole and the other end of it directed to the required spot, washing the panes of glass most effectually. A groom will sometimes avail himself of this arrangement to give his master's horse a bath in the hot weather, the latter approving of it highly, turning himself luxuriously about that all parts of his person may partake of the refreshment.

While watching the process one day from my drawing-room window, I saw a pig, who had evidently noted the proceedings (whether the one that went off with the gentleman's white hat or not I can't say; at all events, if so, he had left it at home to-day), come and present himself calmly for ablution. The groom good-naturedly humoured him, and the pig went away much gratified. That was not all. He returned presently with another pig—a brother or friend, perhaps—as a candidate for a similar treat; but the proprietor of the hose had left the spot, and the pair of porkers, exchanging a grunt of disappointment, shouldered their way leisurely off together, casting a business-like eye about them for stray cabbage-stalks as they went.

III.—IN THE AQUARIUM.

I MUST pass over a number of marine monsters, all worthy of a large amount of wonder (I cannot quite say admiration, except in a modified sense), and only dwell upon the peculiarities of two or three that struck me particularly as I gazed upon them and studied their looks and habits.

Among the first of these was what I supposed to be a dog-fish, who remained stationary for upwards of a minute in the water within twelve inches of where I stood, and stared fixedly at me, as though anxious to carry away to his friends a faithful description of my personal appearance and a hint or two as to the probable part that I played in creation. Having satisfied himself in this respect, he sailed

away for a few yards, but returned presently with the view of refreshing his memory on some point requiring further diagnosis, then disappeared behind an adjacent projection of rock.

The next dreadful-looking object that came under my notice was a creature some two feet long—whether flounder, turbot, plaice, brill, skate or sole I cannot say, not being sufficiently read up in these matters—but possessed of a physiognomy more diabolical than anything I had ever seen before, have ever seen since, or ever wish to see again: a species of nightmare calculated to haunt the imagination to the end of one's days. He came and stuck himself close against the glass in a perpendicular position, and rolled about a pair of projecting optics, remarkable less for their beauty than a wicked squint that greatly increased my aversion to his company.

This gentleman's visit over and his respects duly paid, he was succeeded by a ghastly affair like a heap of cream-coloured sponge, splashed with red, which presented itself in a succession of jumps, rolled its hideous eyes, shook its legs (of which it was gifted with a large assortment), blew itself out like a balloon, collapsed to a sixth part of its original size, and bounded off in the same buoyant style that had marked its approach: a sort of Spring-heeled Jack-of-the-Waters, who perhaps figured in that capacity for the amusement of his finny friends.

These sights over, I fell to an examination of the neighbouring crustacea. Passing over several queer species that were not unknown to me, I was attracted by a gigantic lobster that lay crouched against the near side of the aquarium, and appeared to be acting as sentinel or gatekeeper at the entrance of a passage between that and a high weed-covered crag that was situated in mid-ocean. We will, for the sake of distinction, call this blue-black hero "*Ferox*," from his native fierceness and ferocity. He allowed several crayfish, on account, doubtless, of their distant relationship to him (though relatives are not always the best of friends), to scramble by, and also one or two crabs; but he seized hold of a third and nipped off a leg with his formidable *secateurs*. He was about to operate as successfully upon another limb, when his intended victim, finding there was no time to lose, took to his remaining legs and scampered off as quickly as his wounds would allow him. Now came another crab, but delicately, as though begging permission and a safe passage, and he also escaped without fatal molestation. Next marched a lively young lobster unchallenged, and after him a much larger one, who was pacifically disposed and humble in aspect; whereupon *Ferox*, though his eyes glared from the top of their "stalks," gave him gracious permission to get on, *providing* that he did not inconvenience him in any way, or so much as brush his august person, however lightly, in the experiment. We will name this last worthy "*Tremor*," from his extreme timidity. I was interested in observing the crouching and servile manner in which he made his advances. Tremor was

evidently a thorough coward, for he measured his distances and economised his ground with the most scrupulous care and nicety. There was barely room between the enemy and the rock for safe pedipulation (to coin a word), but he contrived to steal by without touching Ferox's legs, which were extended at much greater length than was at all necessary. The moment he had effected his object, however, some strange panic having seized him, he doubled himself up, gave a sudden flip, and went, tail first, through a narrow opening between two rocks many yards off, and disappeared.

This was a wonderful feat ; but I was informed by an old fisherman (clad in a battered sou'-wester and a complete suit of tarpaulin) that lobsters often played this trick, and he had known one to leap upwards of thirty feet, entering a hole not half its own size, and taking all his legs and other appurtenances safely with him. I may add that I see this statement confirmed by more than one reliable authority on the subject.

"And now for it !" said I, as another lobster presented himself—a full-grown one, and worthy in every way of Ferox's powerful nippers. I apprehended a scene, and was not disappointed. We will call him "Sævus," for he was a thorough savage. He surveyed Ferox defiantly, and Ferox erected his "eyestalks" again in a way that meant battle. To it they went. Ferox seized his opponent by what we may term an elbow with one of his tremendous claws (the knobbed one, which is made for holding on), and wrenched one of his legs off with the other (the cutter), a compliment for which Sævus expressed his gratitude by tearing a piece out of Ferox's throat and seriously damaging his "swimmerets." Then there was a frightful grappling and clapper-clawing and throwing up of sand, and I couldn't tell for a minute what had taken place ; but when the water grew a little clear and calm, I saw Sævus standing alone among what seemed to be half a dozen amputated legs, some scraps of shell, a particle of tail, or "telson," and a broken pair of antennæ. Ferox had vanished altogether, and our friend Sævus remained master of the field. But he looked dilapidated and poorly, and would most likely have to retire to some quiet nook, like a gallant three-decker after action, to get his masts and spars repaired, and his other gear into fit order for further naval enterprises.

An interesting object forming part of the attractions of the aquarium, and accommodated with an enclosed sheet of water in another wing of the building, was the seal—a fine specimen, with a countenance far more intelligent than that of many a human being, and eyes of wonderful beauty and lustre, particularly when he sat upright in the water, closed them for a moment, as if weary of life, and then, when spoken to, opening them again suddenly with a luminous flash and splendour, like the breaking of the sun through a cloud. He was full of fun and frolic, and watched for the raw herring occasionally thrown to him with an eagerness that spoke a little of the *bon vivant*,

and which he disposed of with marvellous dispatch. He suffered spectators, too, to stroke and pat him, and seemed pleased at being petted and caressed. A pity to ill-treat so gentle and inoffensive a creature. Oh, ye ladies of England—I mean the more true and tender-hearted among you—if you could only see these poor helpless animals, as they lie so unsuspectingly along the rocks by the sea-shore, with their young ones playfully sporting around them, clubbed, speared, and slaughtered in hundreds by the cruel traders for the sake of the fur with which Nature has clothed their bodies, you would vow never to wear another sealskin cap, or mantle, or jacket as long as you live.

IV.—BLONDIN AND FATIMA.

GENTLEMAN AND LADY SPIDERS.

As I sat musing one day in my arm-chair, with my eye fixed upon the ceiling, I saw a small spider hanging comfortably there by a short strand of thread, like the stout gentleman I used to observe enjoying an afternoon *siesta* in his hammock, suspended from a beam in the between-decks of an American liner. I do not kill spiders when I can help it, and I moved forward with the intention of throwing the present one out of the open window; but, when I looked again, he was gone. Thinking he might have cunningly dropped to the floor, I searched around with no success, and resumed my seat. On glancing upward the next moment, there hung the spider as before; on advancing again he was gone.

This occurred several times, and I thought it odd. I watched closely, therefore, and the secret was out. The clever animal (for spiders are not insects, I believe) on my approach began to *spin round*, and that so rapidly as to become quite invisible. I found this to be the case every time I advanced, and the rotatory motion to cease on my retiring. Now I considered this extremely ingenious, and gave orders to my servant-maid that the spider should not be disturbed. I presented him with the freedom, not of the city, but of my dining-room, and he enjoys it still.

Fatima was another spider, inhabiting a corner of my bedroom window, the upper sash of which, stupidly enough, had not been constructed for letting down. She had a neat little inner snugery, luxuriously lined, from which, when I first made her acquaintance, she refused to come out, eyeing me furtively, and seeming to say to herself, "He looks friendly, but appearances are sometimes deceptive." By degrees, however, this mistrust wore away, and Fatima would descend an inch or two down the web, and then gallop back again, till I offered her a fly, which, after some modest hesitation, she took from my fingers, killed, coated with a blue film, tacked to her tail, and, drawing up behind her, hung in the larder.

From this time, whenever I called her, she would come out and take anything that was presented for her acceptance, showing a decided preference for a moderate-sized blue-bottle, declining a caterpillar, ignoring a daddy-long-legs, and growing excited over a wasp, which, upon becoming entangled in her meshes, she would release as quickly as possible, cutting away the surrounding web and letting the dangerous intruder drop to the ground. The cool vindictiveness with which she would dig her mandibles into her victims and hold on, despite their struggles, was a rather ugly sight; but the rolling up in shroud and hauling home—as I have seen a horse dragging a harrow or heap of brushwood along a field—had a touch of the ludicrous.

Thus far Fatima was only acting according to her natural instincts, but a further proceeding on her part disgusted me beyond the power of language. It was this. She had a husband (only about half her own size), a rather idle, good-for-nothing fellow, it is true, but still her husband. One day I saw her eyeing him very steadily for some minutes, and I feared from the expression of her countenance that something evil must be passing in her mind; but I did not dream of murder. She sprang upon him suddenly, killed him with a few savage nips, in spite of his violent efforts to escape, dragged him home, sucked his blood, and ate him by degrees, leaving his wretched skin and legs dangling from a rope and vibrating with every passing breath of wind.

V.—BAPTISTE AND THE BEAR.

"It was one very cold night, monsieur," said Baptiste, of "Wolf and Wild Turkey" celebrity, "and as I had lost my rifle, as well as the pouch containing the flint and steel, in shooting a rapid, I couldn't light a fire. So I climbed a rotten hemlock, the top of which had been blown off by the wind, and let myself down into the hollow; but I had no sooner done this than I saw that there was no time to be lost in getting up again, for my life wasn't worth a pinch of powder. I had lighted *among a litter of bear's cubs*, and, thinking I was their mamma come back from a foraging expedition with something nice for supper, they began to sniff about me, and pat my legs with their paws. Then, finding their mistake, they set up a prodigious howl, by way of signal to their interesting parent that all was not quite right at home, that a guest who was no particular friend of the family had dropped in, and had better be politely asked to walk out again. Now I knew that a lady bear, with a select party of sons and daughters, was not the pleasantest person possible to meet, so I didn't need a second notice to quit, nor care how soon I was off the premises. It was no very easy matter, however, to climb the *inside* of the tree, for there was little hold for one's claws; and I had not made my way up above a yard or so when I saw the stars suddenly

blotted out above, and a large dark object *coming down right upon the top of me*. It was the old she-bear, descending tail first, just as a man would come down a ladder. What was to be done? Escape was hopeless with the whole of the inside of the tree blocked up; and yet, if I was caught there, I knew I should be torn to pieces in five seconds. An awkward position, monsieur."

"Well," said I, "and what did you do, Baptiste?"

"Why, there was only one thing *to be done*, monsieur, and that I did. My long hunting-knife was, fortunately for me, in my belt. I whipped that out and, apologising for the liberty, drove it half a dozen times into the bear's tail with such right hearty will, too, that she roared for mercy, and began to make her way up the hemlock again as fast as her legs could carry her, thinking (for she didn't know of my presence there) that her cubs had gone mad during her absence, and privately arranging to pay them off presently for the ugly trick they had played her. At the same moment I held tightly on to the brute's shaggy hide as she ascended, and was lifted as neatly out of the tree as though a machine had been invented for the express purpose."



THE GHOST.

WHY did you come from the dead, dead love,
To trouble my peace once more?
I scatter'd sweet flowers your grave above,
And I wept you very sore;
I buried you deep in my heart, and flowers
I scatter'd above your head,
And I wrote on the stone, *Here lie the hours*
Of a summer-time that's dead.

Why do you come with your mournful eyes
Out of your grave again?
All life and death between us two lies,
And you stretch your hands in vain.
I cannot come to you where you stand,
And you may not reach me more—
Why do you stretch an imploring hand
From the ever-receding shore?

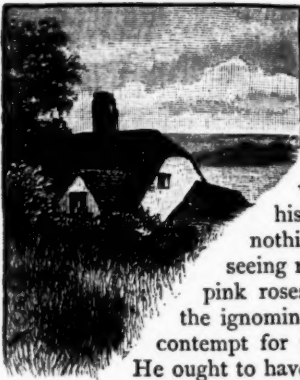
You have gone to the land that they call *Too late*,
Where the flowers all wither unblown,
Where winter in vain for spring doth wait,
And the fallows lie unsown;
And I cannot come to you there, dead love,
Tho' I were never so fain;
So why do you come from the dead, dead love,
To trouble my peace again?

PILGRIMS OF THE NIGHT.

BY SARAH DOUDNEY.

CHAPTER XX.

TURNING BACK.



IT was a grey evening. Rain was falling fast as Bennet walked away from Portman Square. He had no umbrella, and he was dimly conscious of the little splashes falling all over him.

He did not ask himself where he was going; he just walked on, turning his face towards the Marble Arch, hearing nothing but the sound of a silvery laugh, seeing nothing but a figure in creamy silk with pink roses in its hair and breast. To a sense of the ignominy of his defeat succeeded a furious self-contempt for the folly which had contributed to it. He ought to have known her better.

She had deceived Joscelyne as she had deceived him. Truth was not in her nature; love was not in her heart. She was an exquisitely tinted piece of flesh and blood, evidently designed to please the eye alone. Somebody would buy her and pay a high price; but she must be bought with hard cash, not with that heart-wealth which leaves the purchaser with nothing more to bestow.

He was walking fast, and the rain was still falling. It was growing dark, and he had not even decided where he should sleep that night. All at once he bethought him of the rooms in Soho Square, and remembered that, as yet, few changes could have been made in them. And Dulcie? She had, of course, gone off by an early train.

He suddenly resolved to go back to his old lodgings, and sleep in his own room. In the morning he would tell Doverill that his books and things were not to be touched. He had left his portmanteau in charge of a porter at Waterloo Station when he hurried off to Portman Square. It was now nine o'clock, and he hailed a cab and drove to the station at once.

The drive, and the business of reclaiming his property, helped him to collect his scattered thoughts. He was wet, and very miserable, and he had forgotten all about his dinner. Stepping up to the

refreshment counter he called for brandy and soda ; and then for the hundredth time he cursed his own folly. He had brought all this discomfort on himself for the sake of a mere dream.

How beautiful she was ! He thought of the bright, silky hair that he had swept away from her brow, and the delicate outlines of the flower-like face which had rested on his breast. Never any more would he hold her in his arms as he had held her then. And he had so nearly won her.

Because the fruit had been so near his lips, it was snatched away for ever. Leila would not lose her head again. Soon, very soon, she would join the virtuous community of British matrons, and be shocked at the least deviation from the straight road of propriety ; all the more shocked because her own pretty feet had strayed dangerously near a forbidden path.

He wondered who she was going to marry. Her hint had been plain enough. Some big golden ball had rolled to her feet, and she had kicked him away to make room for it. He hated her ; yes—

“He hated her with the hate of hell,
But he loved her beauty passing well.”

It was still raining as fast as ever ; a persistent downpour which had flooded the streets and blurred the lights. The hansom turned into Soho Square, and stopped at the familiar door before he thoroughly realised where he was.

When he passed through the door into the dimly-lighted hall, a sense of personal isolation took possession of him. The one absorbing object of thought and activity had been taken out of his life. He had lived so entirely in this intrigue that even his appetite for work had been deadened. The passion which he fancied was an inspiration was in reality destruction to him. And as he went slowly upstairs, he wondered wearily when he could get his powers into regular working order again ?

He opened the door of the sitting-room, and the room was neither dark nor empty. There was the shaded lamp upon the table, and there was Dulcie at her work, looking as if she had never moved since he went away.

His surprise at seeing her was so great that he could not speak. He shut the door, and stood leaning his back against it, forgetting that he was wet through. She looked up, saw him, and suppressed an exclamation.

As she rose, and they stood fronting each other, the state of his clothes caught her eye. His coat glistened in the lamplight ; everything about him was dank and dripping ; his face looked haggard and strange.

“You are drenched,” she said. “You must change your clothes at once !”

"I have been caught in the rain," he answered rather stupidly. "How is it you are still here, Dulcie?"

"I put off going till to-morrow. You don't know how wet you are, Bennet."

"I know that I'm very uncomfortable. My portmanteau is downstairs; I am not going away."

"Nothing has been touched in your room," she said in a voice that trembled slightly. A stranger could not have told whether she were glad or sorry to see him again; but he knew that she was glad.

When he went upstairs he was conscious of a sense of comfort and relief. The room had never looked so home-like before: an old dressing-gown, hanging on a peg behind the door, was a welcome spectacle. He might put it on and be as great a fright as he liked. In the presence of Leila he would not have dared to wear such a thing; but when he wore it he had always been able to work well. It seemed to have some mysterious connection with his thinking powers.

Dulcie, knocking at the door, left him a can of hot water, and went quietly back to the sitting-room. He came down presently, wearing the dressing-gown, and confessed that he was thoroughly worn-out and used up.

She asked only one question, "Would he like to have something to eat?"

When he said yes, she extemporised a little meal, and he silently acknowledged that she was a useful person to live with. With all his cleverness he did not understand this woman whom he had married against his will. Nor did he know that she had divined his intended flight. She had trained herself so well that he could not guess the anxiety which was consuming her. Had he only deferred his purpose, or given it up altogether?

Although he was still feeling beaten and bruised, he had got back the full possession of his senses. As he sat and smoked, Dulcie thought that he was looking more like his old self.

"I suppose Doverill has been here," he said after a short pause. "Yes? I shall see him to-morrow and tell him I have changed my mind. I don't care about parting with my things after all."

Dulcie was putting something into her work-basket. Her hands were trembling, and her cheeks were quite white; but she kept her face turned away from him.

"It's a mistake to make plans rashly," he went on, apparently enjoying his cigarette. "All things considered, I shall not be in a hurry to give up these rooms. They are uncommonly comfortable in cold weather. In the spring one may make a move."

"We were warm here last winter," said Dulcie, feeling that she was expected to speak.

"Exactly. We will come back to our old quarters after the summer holidays,"

He had not meant to commit himself to any plans for the future ; but then it was fated that he was to do nothing which he had meant to do. It had been a day of frustration.

It is an ill wind, however, that blows nobody any good. Dulcie, overcome with joy, could not think of anything to say. Her modern sisters would call her a poor creature ; but she loved her husband so well that even her incomplete wedded life was too good to lose. She was to come back to her patient, humdrum existence, and was thankful.

"Dulcie," he said, as he lit another cigarette, "I haven't the least idea where to spend my holiday. What kind of place is the village you are going to ? Are there any villas stuck about, or other horrors of that sort ?"

"Villas !" Dulcie laughed softly. "Nobody ever builds there. They put up new schools a year ago, because the old place let in the rain on the children's heads ; that is all."

"And the cottage where your people live ?"

"It is a pretty, tiny nest with three little bedrooms upstairs. Downstairs there is only a parlour and kitchen. Father and mother do not want many rooms, you see."

Bennet reflected before he spoke again.

"Isn't there any good-sized farmhouse near ?" he asked. "A man wants a couple of rooms, big enough to breathe in, if he has to sit cudgelling his brains, you know ?"

The light in Dulcie's eyes was wonderful just then ; but she was afraid to look up lest her joy should be seen. She did not even venture to glance at Bennet through her long, dark lashes. She was winding up the yard-measure into a neat little coil while she answered him.

"Yes," she said quietly. "There is a large old house just taken by a young farmer and his wife. They have no children ; but I know they are not rich. I think they might be glad of a lodger."

"Then perhaps they'll take me in," he said.

"There would be no people for you to associate with," she faltered. "But the woods and fields are lovely, and it is a land of wild flowers. I think it is the sweetest place I have ever seen ; but then I have seen few places, so you must not heed what I say."

There was something quaint and touching in the last words which made him smile. Poor Dulcie ! She had seen few places, and known few loves ; he heart was still as fresh as the wild flowers of which she spoke. As he looked at her, he thought again of that other woman whose great blue eyes had haunted him for many a day—ay, and would haunt him yet in wakeful nights. Could it be possible that he had parted with her only two or three hours ago ?

A flood of fancies rushed over him. He was no longer in this dull room in Soho Square. He was travelling fast, through gusts of rain, and Leila, in her grey dress, was sitting by his side. What did they

care about weather, those two who were wrapped up in their dream of passion? At the journey's end, in the shades of the New Forest, they might wake perhaps to a consciousness of what they had left behind. But alone together in the railway carriage, with the rain beating against the panes——

He shook himself and rose, throwing the stump of his cigarette into the empty grate. Dulcie, growing hot and cold by turns, rose too.

"Hazelmoor is the name of your village, isn't it?" he said suddenly. "Well, we'll go down there together to-morrow, Dulcie. I must take my chance of getting a lodging."

He nodded a kindly good-night, and went upstairs, leaving her standing motionless. He had come back to her and to the old prosaic life, after wandering in some enchanted country of which she had had but a dim vision. She too roused herself and went up to her little room, remembering all the business of the coming day; but it was long before she could sleep.

Once, when the pillow was hot and tumbled, she got up and pressed her cheek against the cool window-pane. The rain had ceased; stars were shining above chimneys and roofs; there was a promise of a clear dawning. She remembered the faith-healer's words about love—"Let your heart's question be, not what you are to gain, but what you are to give." If she could begin her married life again, how different it should be!

Was it really best for him to be bound when she had longed for her own death to set him free? Sometimes the chain that galls us holds us back from a dark abyss. She did not know—nor did he know—that the hated fetter had been his friend. Something seemed to tell her that his soul had drawn a little nearer to hers to-night; but how or why she could not say.

Bennet tossed miserably all night long, and fell into a deep sleep after sunrise. When he got up he felt feeble and shaken, as if he were coming out of an illness. The world was a changed place; it was greyer, flatter, smaller, than it had ever been before. Nothing in it seemed of much value or consequence. There was, however, a slight stir of comfort in the thought that he was not quite alone. Dulcie would be sitting at the breakfast-table, keeping his coffee hot. It would have been much worse if he had found only solitude and neglect downstairs.

He went down, and saw just what he expected to see, not the radiant creature of his dream, but his wife. She was simply dressed in a black-and-white check gown, and wore a cluster of golden Marguerites at her bosom. She looked a little pale, and there were dark shadows under her eyes; but the smile hovering round her well-cut mouth was sweet and true.

"It is a good thing to have come to a decision," he said, as she handed him his cup. "I'm glad I am going to a place I have never

seen. It holds out all sorts of possibilities ; and I shall find freshness there, if there is nothing else."

"Peace is there," said Dulcie timidly. "It is like the valley where the beautiful lilies grew, in the Pilgrim's Progress. I could almost fancy I heard the shepherd boy sing, as he sang to Christiana and her children."

"I know the song," said Bennet, smiling to himself.

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride."

He was thinking that there was no fear of any fall for *him*. If ever a man had been knocked down flat, he was that man.

Just as he had finished breakfast, Doverill walked in. Both men started ; Bennet looked a little foolish ; his friend pretended not to be surprised.

"Stupid things, plans," said Bennet, airily. "They always get changed just at the last. But my traps are all packed, so I'm going to run down into the country with Mrs. Daughton."

"Splendid weather for the fields," said Doverill, glancing at Dulcie, and instantly perceiving the happy change in her face. "Last night's rain has freshened up everything. How it *did* rain !"

"I got a thorough soaking, but I'm all right this morning. After all, Doverill, I've decided to let my things stay here. I owe you all manner of apologies,—awfully sorry, you know ; but——"

"Not a bit of it, my dear boy," broke in the artist, who was the best-tempered fellow in the world. "I'm always doing the same kind of thing myself."

"Have some breakfast," said Bennet, with his hand upon the bell.

"Let me give you a cup of coffee," came in a pleasant voice from Dulcie.

"Thank you," said Doverill, gratefully. He liked her very much indeed, and secretly wanted to put her into a picture. How he would like to paint the golden light in those luminous brown eyes !

Bennet was not ill-pleased with his wife's behaviour that morning. Her taste for simple gowns was a good point ; most girls from a village were addicted to blazing colours and extravagant fashions when they came to London. Looking at her through Doverill's artistic eyes, he was conscious that she had improved very much.

Most of us catch something from the friends we love who are often with us. From Christabel, Dulcie had caught that expression of noble peace which is the divinest look that any human face can wear. It was this look which attracted Doverill, and made him think of silent victory.

A little later she was sitting opposite to her husband in the railway carriage, and they were rushing out of London into the fair green country.

They did not talk much. To Bennet it seemed as if the strangeness of the situation would never wear off; and yet he did not wish he had acted differently. If Dulcie felt it strange she showed no awkwardness. Her cheerful calm was soothing his nerves unawares; she was like a swallow which has found its summer.

It was still early in the afternoon when the train stopped at a quiet little station, and she explained that they must get out here, and drive on to Hazelmoor. Bennet trusted himself entirely to her guidance, and looked with an amused air at the ancient vehicle which was to take them to their destination.

But as they jogged along the sweet, silent road, he was more and more certain that he had done well to come here. It was a flowery country, half asleep in the July sunshine, and Bennet, worn with wakeful nights, was growing drowsy in the soft air. He was beginning to nod at last in his corner of the old fly, when Dulcie gently roused him.

"This is Bolt's farm," she said. "I will go in and ask Mrs. Bolt if you can lodge here."

She stopped the driver and got down, entering the door of a picturesque farm-house with latticed windows. In a few minutes she came out again, followed by a rosy young woman, and a still rosier man.

"It is all right," she said cheerfully. The farmer laid hands on Bennet's portmanteau, and Mrs. Bolt seized upon his Gladstone bag. He descended from the fly, and looked gravely at Dulcie.

"Is your cottage far away?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "It is only a few yards off. The turn of the road hides it from your sight."

CHAPTER XXI.

AT LAST.

DULCIE'S father and mother were rather uneasy when they heard that Bennet was at Bolt's farm. They could not understand how such a devoted wife could consent to a separation.

"It isn't natural," said Simeon Goss. "It's not natural for you to sleep under one roof while he bides under another. How long be you both going to stay here?"

"I don't know," replied Dulcie, cheerfully. "But I hope we shall have a long holiday."

"The girl looks well and happy, don't she, mother?" said Simeon, surveying his daughter with a critical air.

"To be sure she does," Mrs. Goss answered, with an admiring look at her child. "It's not for us to make remarks upon the ways

of littery people, Simeon. As to Dulcie, I never saw her look so comely. Let them please themselves, *I say*."

Goss's cottage stood alone. It had cream-coloured walls, a golden thatched roof, and a bright-brown door; and the front garden was so crammed with flowers of brilliant hue, that it looked like a gaudy picture cut out of a child's scrap-book. Dulcie's tiny room was as neat as the cell of a bee. Roses nodded in at the open casement, and she could see the roof of Bolt's farm between the trees.

Bennet, on his part, was very well pleased with the quarters which had been found for him. He had two large rooms which had been added to the old house, and were quite cut off from the household and its doings. The furniture was scanty; but there was enough for his needs. A table standing in the bay window was the very place for his desk and manuscripts. Below lay a wide green meadow bounded by a fence and a copse. The sweet air came sweeping over the fresh grass like a whisper from his boyhood.

Later on, when he had washed, and had something to eat, he sauntered out of doors. As he turned the corner of the road, he saw a woman coming towards him at a slow pace. She had a wide-brimmed straw hat, and wore some roses in the front of her gown.

"Dulcie," he said, "are you tired? Shall we go and walk in that field?"

"Yes," she answered, "there is a footpath which leads into the copse. I will show you the way."

They went together, both feeling that they were treading the borders of a new life. Yesterday seemed an age ago, and yet it was fresh in their memories.

"If I had not come away from town. I should have been ill," he said, after a short silence. "I was sick of it all! The women who smiled until their mouths were fixed in an everlasting simper, and the other women who rushed at me with fierce eyes, and commanded me to write about their mission. What an unsatisfying world it is, isn't it, Dulcie?"

"Yes," she said, in that full-toned, quiet voice which was one of her developments. "But we don't want to be satisfied yet—not for ages."

"What do we want?" he asked.

"To go from strength to strength, and from height to height. This is the beginning. But I think you should listen to the women with fierce eyes and missions."

"Do you champion fierceness?" he asked, laughing.

"Isn't it possible that you mistook their eagerness for fierceness, Bennet? Earnestness is seldom pretty. It sharpens the features and widens the eyes; but when you want to make the world better you forget your material body."

"You have been wanting to make the world better, Dulcie, have you not? Is that how you have been spending your time?"

It was the first time that he had asked this question. Until this moment he had not shown the least interest in her way of living her life.

They were walking slowly across the field, treading out sweetness with every step. The summer evening enfolded them in its wonderful calm. Dulcie's thoughts went back to the ill-smelling streets where she had worked with the Pilgrims of the Night, and she paused before she answered.

"I have seen a great deal of poverty and sorrow," she said, "and I have tried to give relief. I have not done much, but my life has been made richer by out-giving."

They entered the green alley carpeted with grass and little flowers; at the end of the long vista there was the calm gold of the sunset, clear and holy. Bennet looked into his wife's face, and saw that it was not the face he used to know.

"How you are changed!" he said involuntarily. "Why is it? What has changed you?"

"The people I have been with," she replied with perfect frankness.

"How strange this is, Dulcie! It is as if we had met in another world, and begun our acquaintance anew! I could fancy we had died and begun to live again."

They had come to the end of the alley, and as he spoke they emerged from the green gloom, and stood out upon a wide heath stretching far away to the west. They stood, as it were, surrounded by the clear gold of the evening; and Dulcie thought of the light that never was on sea or shore.

"Is the new life better than the old?" she asked.

"As yet I can hardly tell. It is calmer. We have left a great deal behind us in the shadows, things that looked splendid while we were there."

"It was the dark that made them seem splendid," Dulcie said.

"I know; I have been in it."

Again he looked at her, comparing her face with that brilliant face which had reigned over his dreams so long. Dulcie was no longer a blooming girl; she was a woman, with a clear, pale complexion, and features which had gained a new delicacy of outline. The lips were set in the curve of patience; the eyes had the look of those that watch for the unseen. The charm of the countenance was its earnestness blent with repose, an expression one never sees until the soul has risen above the sorrows of the heart. Dulcie had grown like Christabel Avory; her nature had received the spiritual good which the Faith-healer could give.

"Tell me," he said, as they moved slowly across the heath, "tell me more about the life you have led. I have not known anything about you. How did you spend the days?"

"First there was the morning marketing and finding out the cheap places. I didn't want to waste your money, you know, and——"

"You have wasted nothing," he interrupted. "You spent wonderfully little."

She brightened. "I like economy; it exercises one's wits; and if I had not gone into humble streets I should not have met my best friends. Then, nearly every day, I wrote to my father and mother, telling them all about the things I saw and heard. I grew very fond of writing letters; so fond that I thought I would try to write little stories; but that was later on."

"How you surprise me!" he said. "I should never have suspected you of writing stories. What did you do with them when they were written?"

"I copied them in a clear, round hand, and lent them to the sick children I knew. There was always a great deal to do; mothers want help with their families, and old people want visiting and comforting."

"Is it the poor you call your best friends?"

"Yes. Our best friends are those who have need of us; don't you think so? When we see our work we do it, and find peace in the doing."

"You are willing to go back to London, Dulcie?"

"More than willing. I have learnt so much. It was there I saw that there is always one path on which the light falls clear, the path of human fellowship and love."

"Then you have found happiness in that path?" he asked.

"I have ceased to look for it; ceased to think of it. I know that it can never be found outside my own spiritual life."

"Dulcie, you have become a mystic!"

"Perhaps I have; I don't know. I only feel that I am a pilgrim passing through the night to day."

"Are you sure of finding the day at the end?"

"I am not afraid," she answered. "I have no reason to give for my conviction; I cannot talk about proofs. Is it not Emerson who says, 'I am a better believer, and all serious souls are better believers in the immortality than we can give grounds for? The real evidence is too subtle.' That is all I can say."

"It is enough," said Bennet. "Would that all men and women said as little! Talk puts out the modest flame of belief. There is something austere in Emerson which braces one's thoughts. Are you tired, Dulcie? Shall we turn back?"

"I am not tired; oh, no! But father and mother go early to bed, and they will want their supper. We will not return through the wood; here is a little path between these furze-bushes which brings us into our lane. Out in the open ground we shall see the last of the sunset. It is all as lovely as a dream!"

She drew a long breath for very gladness. To her this flowery heath was as sweet as the land of Beulah. The joy in her face arrested Bennet's gaze.

"Dulcie," he said, as they paused at last in front of Goss's cottage, "will you let me see the stories you have written? Did you pack them up with your things?"

"Yes; they are in a corner of my trunk. You shall see them, but please remember that they were written only for children."

"Can you get them now, while I wait?"

She vanished through the open door, overhung with creepers, and presently returned, carrying half-a-dozen cheap copy-books. These contained her literary efforts, and she blushed as she put them into his hand.

"It was for the children I wrote," she repeated. "I love the little ones so much that I may be forgiven if I am foolish for their sakes."

Poor Dulcie. In her clear eyes he read a thought of her own dead child.

He was silent for a moment, and looked at her steadily and sadly. The light of her eyes was as pure and calm as that of a planet; but it was not the light which he had seen there in the old days.

From the cottage-door came Mrs. Goss's voice saying that supper was ready.

"Good-night," he said reluctantly.

Walking slowly along the lane, he fell to wondering anew at the turn which his life had taken. Instead of dwelling with Leila in Elysium, he was living with rustics in an unknown village, and beginning a friendship with a certain woman called his wife. No one expressed any surprise at their partings and meetings; everything that they did was accepted in a matter-of-fact fashion by the cottagers around them. Hazelmoor did not feel particularly interested in the gentleman who wrote books, and was, most likely, a bit wrong in his head. Looked mortal white, that'n did. Study, study, study, from mornin' to night; and that was what come on it. Married Goss's darter a matter of two or three years ago. Not much of a match for her, by all accounts; but she did seem to keep up her sperrits wonderful well.

He sat down alone to a substantial supper in his parlour, and realised that the excitement of yesterday was telling upon him heavily. Everything and everybody went early to bed in Hazelmoor. When the fowls had gone to roost, and the cattle had been cared for, there was no earthly reason for sitting up. The absurdity of using your eyes, when you might close them in healthy slumber, was so apparent to the rustic mind that Mrs. Bolt was nearly out of lamp oil. The farmer was going to the nearest town, ten miles away, on the morrow, and would get all that was required. After examining the lamps, Bennet suggested that it would be well to buy a new one.

Next morning, when he opened his eyes, the little farm-world was all astir. The scent of clover came in through the open windows, and he strolled out of doors while Mrs. Bolt was getting his breakfast. It

was a friendly world in which he found himself; the cat rubbed his legs with a loud purr; the old fox-hound wagged his tail at the newcomer; no living creature showed any displeasure at the sight of him.

When breakfast was over, he sat down at the table in the bay window, and began to read *Dulcie's* manuscripts. It was an easy task; the writing was as clear as print, and here and there were the little marks left by children's fingers. Many library volumes were not half as well thumbed as these cheap copy-books, filled with the fancies of a loving and lonely heart.

Bennet was more and more astonished as he read on. The tales were worded with a quaint simplicity, which he had noticed sometimes in *Dulcie's* speech; but he was not prepared for her flights of imagination. Nor did he expect to be so stirred by her touches of pathos. One story, of a lost child, absolutely throbbed with motherhood. Another, about a boy who was always finding things, had a kind of elfish humour which is utterly wanting in most modern fairy tales.

When he had gone through the manuscripts, he asked himself some puzzling questions. The girl whom he had married in desperation, and disliked and avoided afterwards—who was she?

Gradually, silently, she had stolen away, and had become a shadow of the past. In her stead there was a gentle creature, strong with a grand patience.

“A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller betwixt life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command;
And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel light.”

He took up his Wordsworth and read the lines. They described *Dulcie* better than any words of his own could ever have done.

He was beginning to write another novel, and had paused doubtfully in the middle of the first chapter. Then he had flung it aside, resolved to wait until new ideas came to him. *Leila*, he had said to himself, would inspire him. In the glow of her love, and the delight of her companionship, he could do greater things than he had ever done yet.

That dream was ended. He turned over his portfolio till he came to the unfinished chapter, and found that he liked it no better now than he had done at first. But what he most desired to find—the material for a new book—was close at hand. The story of *Dulcie* was a romance, ready to be put into words. He was so true an artist that he could step out of himself to look at this picture, set in the framework of his own life. He could look at it, and appreciate the value of all its lights and shades, as a stranger would have done.

At once he began to sketch out the introduction to the story.

Tired as he still was, he worked at it with a force which mastered weariness; and before noon he had succeeded in making a beginning which satisfied him. In the afternoon he lay down, languid and worn, and fell asleep; a sleep which made up for many feverish nights of wakefulness. When he woke, his brain was fresh, and his mind clear.

He went out a little later to meet Dulcie in the lane. It might have been his new interest in her which made his heart beat at the sight of her figure, moving slowly under the shade of the trees. She had put on a thick white muslin bodice, and wore a cluster of scarlet geranium and mignonette. Simple as her garb was, the white and scarlet gave her the air of being more stylishly dressed than usual, and displayed her beauty in a new light.

There was not the slightest flutter in her manner. He might have been merely an old friend, who had been on familiar terms with her from childhood.

"Are you rested?" she asked kindly.

He looked at her calm, quiet face, and saw no rush of colour, no sign of the old agitation. Her assiduous self-discipline had given her the composure and dignity of a much older woman.

"Yes, I have had plenty of sleep," he said. "Dulcie, do you know you are a born story-teller for children? It is a good gift. You are like the old fellow who carried about a painted umbrella, and held it over the children's pillows, so that they had pretty dreams. I wish you would hold your umbrella over me."

She laughed softly.

"You carry an umbrella of your own," she said. "And the little ones who read my poor tales are easily pleased. If people only knew what small things gave them pleasure!"

"You love children, Dulcie."

"Yes," she answered, "better than anything else in the world."

She did not know that there was a sting in her words. She had become so well accustomed to living her life quite apart from his, that she could not think that he wanted more of her than common kindness.

But Bennet, oddly wayward, wished that she had given him another answer.

"I wonder," he said, after a pause, "if you would like to have your stories printed, and put into a book?"

She turned to him with such a lovely flush of surprise that her face almost dazzled him for a moment. But the flash passed as quickly as it came, and her eyes shone with their usual steady light.

"I haven't thought of such a thing. How could I? I did not know that the little tales were good. If you approve of them they must be better than I supposed. The children have been my only critics, you see."

"In future, Dulcie, I will be your critic. And we will hear what the world has to say of you."

CHAPTER XXII.

MATED.

BENNET thought *Dulcie* said good-night coldly. As if she would let go her hold of herself even for a moment! He saw only the result of her self-training, and could not guess how hard the process had been. She had spent many a weary month in acquiring the gentle friendliness which governed her intercourse with her husband. She gave him just as much as she thought he wanted; no more.

But women's thoughts do not always fathom the depth of men's wants. And *Dulcie* was not yet conscious of her newly-acquired charms.

The new ideas for the novel still occupied Bennet's mind. He rose early, and set to work after breakfast, sitting at the table by the open window. The last thing that he expected was an interruption. But it came in the middle of the morning.

"Glad to have found you, old man!" said a cheery voice behind him. *Doverill* was standing at the door; a lithe figure in an easy costume, with a sort of bush-ranger air which was not unattractive. It was quite clear that he felt sure of his welcome.

"How the dickens did you get here?" asked Bennet, jumping up, and making a great show of heartiness.

"On a bicycle. Took a dozen wrong roads before I found the right one. What a queer little place it is!"

His eyes were wandering round the room in search of something. He sat down, and heaved a deep sigh of exhaustion.

"Have some home-brewed?" said Bennet.

"Thanks, if it isn't too strong. I'm hot and thirsty. Is Mrs. *Daughton* quite well?"

"Very well indeed," said Bennet walking to the door. "She has gone to stay with her father and mother. They're getting old, and want attention."

His back was turned to *Doverill*, and he could not see the quick look of disappointment which crossed the artist's face.

Mrs. *Bolt* answered the call, and brought a brown jug of ale. *Doverill* took a long draught before he spoke again.

"I hoped I should have seen Mrs. *Daughton*," he said. "The fact is, I thought I might ask her to give me a sitting or two. She has the very face I want for my *Early Christian Martyr*."

"Oh, she isn't far off," Bennet replied. "But it has never struck me that she looked ready for martyrdom. However——"

"I hope you don't object, *Daughton*?" said the artist hastily. "If so, of course——"

"My dear fellow, I don't object in the least. But I can't see why

you are going to paint her as a martyr. And I should think the public would be sick of martyrs?"

"My martyr won't be like all the rest." Doverill was a successful painter, and he knew exactly what he meant to do. "Besides," he went on, "I don't think we have exhausted the Early Christians. There are two women whose pictures have bored the public for years, and they were love-sick fools, both of them. Elaine in her barge; and Isabella, hanging over her disgusting pot of basil. We never have a show without Elaine and Isabella, and sometimes there are two or three of each."

Bennet laughed. He did not want his friend's company; but Doverill had been useful to him in many ways, and was a real good fellow. He must be humoured and entertained.

Nevertheless, it was vexatious to have his quiet intercourse with Dulcie broken into. It was like the beginning of a new wooing, and yet the girl was his wife.

"I can stay for a few days," said Doverill, "and then I must go on to my uncle's place in Berkshire. Do you think that they can put me up anywhere?"

"There's a decent little inn," Bennet answered. He did not suggest that Mrs. Bolt might have a spare room. It would be a mistake to make the way too easy for his friend's feet. "You'll have something to eat with me, of course," he added cordially.

"Thanks," said Doverill. He had, however, expected that Daughton would have welcomed him with rapture. He had more than suspected that Bennet had been on the verge of an elopement with somebody, and that the plan had fallen through at the last moment.

"You can make a sketch of my wife this afternoon," said Bennet, after a pause. "If your time here is short, you will want all the opportunities she can give you. We'll go and see about a bed at the inn, and then I'll step on to her father's cottage."

"Is she so near you?" said Doverill.

"I am here because she is near," replied Bennet, briefly. "She had arranged to stay with her people before I changed my plans. I see her every day."

Doverill was puzzled. It looked as if Bennet cared for his wife after all. And yet when he recalled her pale, tearful face on that unforgotten morning, he was sure that she had been nearly deserted. Well, if these two chose to make up their difference, so much the better for them both. His liking for Bennet was sincere, and he was glad that he had been checked upon the brink of a mad action.

Dulcie was sitting in the porch, busy with needlework, when she saw her husband at the garden-gate. The house-door was open, and her mother, moving in and out of the kitchen, kept up a conversation.

Bees were humming over the roses and mignonette; the everlasting pea was a mass of rich bloom; it seemed as if summer herself had

made her home in old Goss's garden. Surrounded by the splendour of the flowers sat Dulcie, in a clean cotton gown, with a broad black ribbon round her waist.

"Doverill had better paint her as she is now," thought Bennet, as she rose, and came to him. Aloud, he simply said that Doverill had come, and wanted her to give him a few sittings.

She flushed with surprise. "I wonder why he wants to paint me?" she said.

"He is going to paint an Early Christian martyr, and he thinks you have the face of one," said Bennet, scanning her closely.

"But I am not good enough. How could I call up the right expression?"

"You need not call it up; he says it is stamped upon your face. You look as if you were ready to die for your faith. Do you feel like that, Dulcie? These are faithless days, and I suppose 'the right expression' is becoming rare."

"The world will go wrong when there is nothing worth dying for," said Dulcie. "But I hope he doesn't want me to pose; that would be so very difficult!"

"Oh, no: he only wants you to look natural; that is more difficult still."

She laughed a little, and again he wished that the artist were miles away. They would expect her at three, he told her, as he turned reluctantly to the gate.

Fred Doverill had arranged her seat in Bennet's parlour, and waited impatiently for her appearance. Too impatiently, his friend thought. He looked sourly at the artist when she came in.

She had done her best to look well for her husband's sake. Her serge skirt and white cambric bodice became her admirably; the little cluster of scarlet flowers gave a finish to her dress. She smiled as Doverill came forward to greet her, the frank smile of a woman whose mind is at rest.

"This is very good of you, Mrs. Daughton," he said. "I feared I had asked too great a favour. Will you sit here? Thanks! You see I have been looking about for months for some one who realises my idea of St. Dorothea."

Dulcie coloured faintly, and her eyes lit up.

"It is not possible that I can be like her," she said. "I have pictured her to myself a hundred times."

"So have I," replied Doverill, charmed with the light in her face. "I always see her led out between two gaolers, wearing her white tunic, and the white toga with its purple border. At the judge's command she throws back her veil."

"And then Sapritius points to the priest, and the little altar on his right hand," Dulcie went on. "And he asks her courteously to sacrifice."

"It is the supreme moment," said Doverill, who was enraptured

with her expression, and showed his delight so plainly that Bennet thought him a jackanapes. How long was this fooling to last?

Doverill worked away with a will; and by-and-by Bennet stood looking at the sketch of his wife's head, and acknowledging that it was a good likeness. Doverill asked if they would lend him a photograph? Sometimes it was an assistance, he added.

"I have been photographed only once, and that was years ago," said Dulcie, calmly. "It was a very cheap portrait, badly done."

"Only once!" repeated the artist.

Bennet was irritated. He had not been sufficiently interested in Dulcie to want her portrait. Of course Doverill would conclude that he had never cared about her, and then—— Why had he been indifferent so long? What a fool he had made of himself! Doverill was a very good fellow, but there was no reason to suppose that he was much better than other men. And if Dulcie, tasting for the first time the sweets of homage, were to lose her head, it would be no wonder.

When they all three strolled out in the evening, things did not improve. Bennet felt stupid; and Dulcie and the artist sustained the conversation. It seemed that they found each other very interesting, and thought alike on many subjects. Bennet had not even dreamed that his wife could talk so well. She had a quaint, simple way of expressing herself which was uncommon; and then, too, she was an excellent listener. It was maddening to see her glorious eyes fixed on Doverill while he was holding forth complacently on art and literature.

When they parted with Dulcie it was eight o'clock. The Gosses kept early hours, and the cottage door stood open, ready for her to come in.

The table was laid for supper, a simple meal enough in that little household. To Dulcie, sitting down cheerfully with the old couple, it seemed a delicious repast. When it was over, she helped to clear the things away, and brought the big brown Bible to her father. Simeon Goss read a chapter aloud, and then they knelt and repeated the Lord's prayer. At nine o'clock the carpenter bolted the doors, and they went upstairs to bed.

The casement was wide open in Dulcie's little room. A bright moon was shining over the hushed woods and fields; in the garden there was not a breath of wind to stir the flowers. The warm air and the long talk had made her sleepy. She undressed quickly, and bound up her thick hair into a heavy coil for the night.

Then drawing up the blind to let the air enter freely through the open window, she went to bed. It seemed afterwards, that she fell asleep as soon as she touched the pillow. At once she lapsed into a delicious dreamland, full of flowery scents and golden peace. And yet, suddenly, and with a quick leaping of the heart she awoke.

"Dulcie!"

The night was so still that the voice sounded clearly through the

little room. She slipped out of bed in an instant and went to the casement, leaning forward into the moonlight.

"It is I," said Bennet, standing under her window. "It is only a quarter past ten. Were you asleep?"

"I am wide awake now," she answered. "Do you want me?"

"Yes; I want a few minutes' chat. Can you come down without being heard?"

"I think so—they sleep soundly. Wait a minute and I will be with you."

She put on her shoes, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and opened the door with noiseless fingers. Outside the old couple's room she paused and listened to the sound of their regular breathing. Then she crept softly downstairs, withdrew the bolt, and found herself close to Bennet in the porch. They stood there together with the feathery sprays of the creepers brushing their heads.

"I wanted to speak to you about Doverill," he began in a low tone. "He is a good fellow, a very good fellow; but if you are not careful he'll lose his head."

"What can I do?" she asked meekly.

"Well, you must be on your guard. He admires you a good deal too much. A thing of that kind must be nipped in the bud."

He felt her quiver with surprise and pain.

"Oh, I am very sorry," she said, a little above a whisper. "I only wanted to be nice to him because he was your friend. And I did not think he could admire me nowadays—I have grown much plainer of late."

Bennet checked an inclination to laugh. She was quite earnest and serious.

"Dulcie," he said, "you are not a good judge of your own appearance. I think the time has come for you to learn the truth. When I knew you first you were a handsome girl. Now you are a beautiful woman."

"I beautiful? Ah, Bennet, you surely do not wish to deceive me! I have suffered a great deal and grown old."

"You have suffered, my poor girl; yes, I know it. But sorrow has glorified you—it does sometimes. It would take a long while to explain how these changes come to pass. Only be watchful, Dulcie, and don't let Doverill get more friendly than he is now. While he stays here, keep him at arm's length."

"I will do anything you tell me. I do not know the world's ways," she said, sadly. "Am I to give him any more sittings?"

"Yes, two or three more. I don't care about his painting you, but one could not refuse."

"No one will recognise me in the picture. No one knows me."

"But you may be better known some day, Dulcie. And if you are in society you must be prepared to hear pretty speeches. When I take you back to town you will go out with me."

She sighed. It seemed to him that her face grew sadder in the moonlight, and his heart was chilled with a sudden fear.

"What is it, Dulcie?" he asked. "Do you like a solitary life best of all? Do you want to keep your path apart from mine?"

"I do not think of what I want," she answered. "I think only of what is good for you."

"Do you really think it would be good for me to go on living my selfish life? Dulcie, we will not be unnatural any more! In heaven's name, let us be a true husband and wife!"

She could not speak. Almost she believed that she was still asleep and in the middle of a dream. Some dreams are so real that you can put out your hand and seem to touch the objects which surround you. A spray of jasmine hung just within her reach and she broke it off. But her silence tried Bennet severely. He could not tell what it meant.

"Have I worn out your patience?" he asked. "If I have it is no wonder. I don't deserve you, dear. But, if I tell you that I love you dearly, will you try to believe me?"

"Oh, is it true?" she murmured. "Really, really true that you love me?"

He took her into his arms and folded her close to his breast. Never, in the days gone by, had he kissed her with such kisses as he gave her now. It was love that she had won at last.

"We will begin our married life again," he said. "Dearest, let us forget that we made a false start. The true marriage will date from this night."

He felt her heart throbbing fast through the thin folds of her light wrapper. Gently, yet with a firm hand, he drew her inside the cottage and closed the door.

So these two, who had thought themselves for ever divided, attained the union of which both had dreamed. Under the thatched roof which sheltered the old wedded pair, the young couple began their new life. In the woman whom he had despised and shunned, Bennet found the good angel of his days, the companion who would bear all things, and believe all things, because her place is by his side, and

"The shadow of his feet is her abode."

(To be continued.)





A SWEET GIRL GRADUATE.

I.

TRIFLE different, this, to the Rockies—eh, old fellow ?”

“Just a trifle,” responded the other, with a careless shrug of the broad shoulders.

“That was a grand shoot, Colet ; but it couldn’t last for ever, and when all’s told, I must confess to a sneaking fondness for our much-maligned capital.”

“There are worse places, certainly,” admitted the younger man, breaking the ash off his cigar with tender care. “On a day like this the veriest misanthrope must allow that London has its points.”

“Look at that now,” said Enderby, drawing his chair nearer the window and looking down upon the busy Strand. “That rush of struggling life depresses some men ; they can’t stand the wear and tear of it. Now it has just the opposite effect on me, and that’s why I’ve stuck to these diggings so long. When I’m in the middle of the fight, for very shame I must be up and doing.”

“That’s the secret of your getting through so much, is it ?” observed Colet, regarding the rugged face curiously. “I’ve often wondered how you do it. I wish I had some outside impulse to urge me on.”

“Amen to that,” rejoined his companion heartily. “You are pursuing the primrose path of dalliance, my friend, and your best gift in life will be wasted unless you lose your money or fall in love. A good honest, hopeless love would be the making of you.”

“Why hopeless ?” queried the artist, with a laugh. “Why introduce the tragic element into my peaceful existence ?”

“Do you think I should recommend you, even in the service of art, to immolate yourself on the altar of Hymen ?” was the horrified reply. “Far be it from me to doom you to such certain misery. But blighted affection would act as your outside impulse. For a time at any rate you would throw your whole soul into your work.”

“Thanks ; but if the choice is left me, I’d rather pursue the primrose path,” he returned lightly. “Fame’s all very well, and so is good work, but the necessary grind is not so alluring.”

“Your governor did a bad day’s work when he left his little pile to you,” groaned Enderby. “I’d like to make a law that every man with an ounce of brain should start life as a pauper.”

"The women too, I suppose? I only ask for the sake of information."

"So few of 'em possess any to speak of that they needn't be considered," was the prompt reply.

"My dear fellow, that sort of cheap talk won't do in these days of women's colleges and the higher education. Scorn the sex as much as you like, but do them the justice to admit they possess brains. Just look at my cousin Marcia, for instance. She was a great gun up at Newnham, I believe, and now it's her ambition to distinguish herself in the fields of journalism, like you. She's an awfully clever girl."

"What's *her* outside impulse?" inquired Enderby coolly. "Poverty or ugliness? They're mostly ugly, I've noticed, these women with brains."

"Well, for a narrow-minded, cross-grained bigot commend me to Gilbert Enderby," apostrophised his companion, as he rose lazily from his seat. "I only hope you'll come across Marcia one of these days. She'd be a revelation to you; she'd reduce your theories to fine powder in the twinkling of an eye. Good-bye, old fellow, I'm off."

Edward Colet was of a sociable disposition, and nothing gave him greater satisfaction than to fill his handsome studio with as many kindred spirits as he could gather together. He was by no means hypercritical in his choice when left to himself, but for his sister's sake he exercised some little discrimination when he issued his invitations.

It was at one of these gatherings that Enderby met Marcia for the first time, and it was something of a shock to find her so widely different from his preconceived idea of a clever woman. In his overwhelming surprise, he was quite thrown off his balance, and the lion forgot to roar when he found himself in the presence of the lamb. Marcia looked very young and girlish in her thin white gown, and her clear grey eyes met his glance with a childlike trust which he found almost disconcerting.

"I am so very glad to meet you," she said, sweetly, placing her soft hand confidently in his. "Ted has spoken so often about you that I seem to know you quite well."

"Very good of him, I'm sure," he responded, as he seated himself on the black oak bench at her side.

"He said that perhaps you would be so good as to give me a few hints," she went on somewhat timidly. "Literary work is altogether new to me, you know. I have no one who can advise me, unless you will be so kind."

"I don't exactly see in what way I can help you," he replied, quite gently; "but you may be certain of this—I will do all that lies in my power."

"Thank you," she said, her soft eyes full of gratitude. "I felt sure you would."

He regarded her for a few moments with mingled interest and

perplexity. The radiant childish face, the pretty appealing ways bewildered him when he remembered his friend's account of her University honours.

"You did very well at Cambridge, your cousin tells me?" he suggested tentatively, breaking the short silence.

"I was bracketed third in the Classical Tripos," she answered simply. "They rather wanted me to stay up at Newnham and coach, but I didn't feel that I was cut out for teaching."

"You don't look cut out for work of any kind at present," he said bluntly. "It is hard to believe that you are much beyond the nursery yet."

"Ah! Please don't say that," she cried with a quick blush. "I know I look ridiculously young, but every year will mend that, and I *can* work. I can, really."

"Your place in the Tripos is evidence enough of that," he admitted. "The danger is that you may work beyond your strength."

"My difficulty up to now has been in my choice of subject," she said eagerly. "You know I have been lucky enough to get on the staff of the '*Piccadilly Gazette*,' but they allow me so free a hand that I am almost at sea. That was what I wanted your advice about chiefly—as to what kind of subjects to choose."

"It is rare for a young hand to have so much latitude," he observed in a tone of surprise. "How did you get on the staff, Miss Colet?"

"Through my old coach, Mr. Oxenham," she said gratefully. "He has been so good. He knew of my plans for the future, and he used all his influence on my behalf. His brother is sub-editor of the '*Piccadilly*,' you know."

"They must think a good deal of you," said Enderby, "to give you so free a hand. I might put you up to a thing or two, perhaps—I'll do all I can; but if you've got originality, that'll pay you best in the long run. That is Oxenham's idea, evidently, in leaving you free to choose your own subjects."

"But suppose I haven't?" she asked anxiously. "I am so afraid all my ideas will get used up. And what should I do then?"

"Oh, we all feel like that at first," he laughed reassuringly. "Take a leaf out of my book, Miss Colet. Let the idea of to-day satisfy you until to-morrow comes."

"I will try," she said earnestly, her eyes looking with complete unconsciousness straight into his.

"And if any difficulty should arise—if you should want any help, any advice," he went on in the same fatherly manner, "just let me know. I have been over the ground before you, and I may perhaps be able to give you a helping hand along the rough places."

"You are very, very good," she responded gratefully. "It will comfort me to feel that I may bring all my troubles to you. Thank you so much, Mr. Enderby."

If Colet had hoped to change his friend's views by this introduction to his clever cousin, he must have been disappointed, for Enderby denied that she proved anything. She had plenty of brain-power, he admitted that; and she was perfectly charming, he allowed that too; but he maintained that she could not, in any sense, be regarded as a type—she was a delightful freak of nature.

It must be confessed that his estimate of women was by no means a lofty one. His experience had been unfortunate, and it was, perhaps, pardonable that he had generalized from those specimens brought more directly under his notice. But if Marcia did not cause him to modify his opinion of her sex, it was not because he failed to appreciate her; her sweet simplicity, her utter unconsciousness roused all the latent chivalry in his nature.

He met her pretty often at Colet's studio as the weeks went by, and was pleased on two or three occasions to be of some small service to her. He had a vague impression that she lived at home under the care of fit and proper guardians, and it was with a feeling akin to anxiety that he learnt that this was not the case.

He had been working one afternoon in the reference library of the British Museum, and in the wide hall, on his way out, he came across Marcia.

"You here?" he said, greeting her with a smile of genuine pleasure.

"You look surprised," said she. "But that is better than the reproachful air with which the librarian regards me. I am afraid I give him a great deal of trouble, hunting up out-of-the-way manuscripts day after day."

"You are often here, then?" he inquired as they crossed the gravelled courtyard, side by side.

"Oh, yes; nearly every afternoon," she answered, her eyes following the tame pigeons as they wheeled around her. "Do you know, I believe these pretty things begin to know me? I always put a handful of Indian corn in my pocket when I leave home—it is so pretty to watch them flutter down after it."

"They certainly seem to recognise you," he agreed. "But I didn't know you lived in this part of the world?"

"No?" she responded, her bright face raised smilingly to his. "I share a flat in the Gray's Inn Road with an old Newnham friend."

"I hope she *is* an 'old' friend," he said, a shade of anxiety in his shrewd brown eyes. "You are so young, it seems to me, to be living away from home in this great London of ours."

"I am afraid Patricia isn't very old in the sense you mean," returned Marcia, apologetically. "But won't you come back with me to tea and be introduced to her? It would be a new experience for you."

"Thank you," he rejoined with alacrity; "I should be delighted. And I should much like to make your friend's acquaintance."

"Oh, she will interest you, I am sure," was the laughing reply.

"Miss Richardson is a medical student, and she looks upon life as one vast field of possible patients. It is a little gruesome to accompany her on her walks abroad, for she sees signs of some fell disease in nearly everyone she meets. It is somewhat unnerving too to feel that she is always on the scent for street accidents; but I suppose it is natural that she should want all the practice she can get."

"I have noticed that trait in reporters," said Enderby. "The eagerness for 'copy' seems to deaden their sympathies. It is no doubt inevitable, but it is much to be deplored."

"You must not think Patricia hard-hearted," the girl hastened to say with a look of distress. "No one could be more pitiful and tender than she is really. It is only that if there *is* to be somebody injured, she would like to be on the spot to bind up the wounds."

"I understand," was his response. "Well, all honour to the women, as well as the men, who try to relieve human suffering. The field of their labours is wide enough for both."

They had reached by this time the rather dreary block of mansions which Marcia called her home. Enderby was not very favourably impressed by the outside appearance, and his surprise was great when he was shown into one of the prettiest rooms he had ever seen.

"This is my study," explained Marcia, looking round it with a touch of pardonable pride. "That," nodding her head in the direction of a curtained doorway, "is our dining-room; and the room beyond that is Miss Richardson's laboratory. There she works into the silent hours of the night over her ghostly bones and chemicals; and there, I firmly believe, she will blow herself into minute atoms before she becomes a full-fledged M.B."

"And this is where *you* work?" he said, his eyes resting with interest on the pretty writing-table with its array of books and manuscripts.

"And where I play too," she laughed, pointing to a cosy chair near the window. "Won't you try its soft depths, Mr. Enderby, and look over these magazines? I will order tea and see if Miss Richardson is still in the land of the living."

II.

It was many years now since Enderby had joined the ranks of journalists, and for him the hardest part of the fight was over. That he had won so high a place was due in great measure to the fact that he had never failed to profit by the smallest chance that presented itself. Nothing had come amiss to Enderby; no work was too poorly paid; no opening too insignificant for him to accept it. He had not made the fatal mistake of specialising too early; but had cast his nets in many waters and had landed fish of one kind or another from almost all.

Those struggling, impecunious days were over now, and he could well afford to drop all work that was neither lucrative nor congenial. But for old times' sake he still retained some of his early engagements, and among others, that as dramatic critic to one of the minor dailies.

Sincere as his admiration for the drama undoubtedly was, nothing less than a stern sense of duty would have led him to the Haymarket on a certain grilling afternoon in July. Much was expected of the new play, and a strong caste had been drawn together for this trial *matinée*: nevertheless it was with an unmistakably resigned air that he sank into his seat in the stalls. His eyes brightened visibly when his glance fell upon his neighbour, and a smile softened his rugged face as he took the proffered hand.

"This is an altogether unexpected pleasure, Miss Colet," he said warmly. "Is your enthusiasm strong enough to defy weather like this? Or are you like myself—a martyr to duty?"

"I am a martyr, decidedly," she answered with a soft laugh. "Our dramatic critic is taking his holiday, and every other available person has succumbed to the heat. At a moment's notice, Mr. Oxenham called upon me. And here I am, but with the very vaguest idea as to what is required of me."

"Suppose you give me another invitation to tea?" he suggested composedly. "We might then discuss the play at our leisure; and, on the principle that two heads are better than one, we should each reap the benefit."

"Thank you," she whispered gratefully in the hush which preceded the rise of the curtain. "You always help me out of my difficulties. I shall quite enjoy the play now."

But Marcia was reckoning without the thermometer when, in the gladness of relieved responsibility, she turned her radiant face upon the stage. The house was crowded, and in a very short time it became unbearably hot. Fans were fluttering everywhere; vinaigrettes were freely passed from hand to hand; and still, with every minute, the heat grew more and more overpowering.

In the semi-darkness of the auditorium, Marcia's increasing faintness passed unnoticed; but when the lights were turned on at the end of the act, Enderby was shocked at the dead-white of the girl's set face.

"We must get you out of this," he said, rising abruptly. "Take my arm, Miss Colet, and lean on me. The fresh air will soon put you right."

It seemed to Marcia that the next moment she was breathing the pure air of heaven, while Gilbert bent anxiously over her with an empty wine-glass in his hand.

"You—you are very good," she said a little tremulously. "I feel so much better now. Don't let me keep you, Mr. Enderby."

"Do you think I am going to leave you?" he rejoined quietly, handing the glass to the waiting attendant. "I ought to have noticed

before how it was with you. I might have known that you could not stand that stifling heat."

"I should have been all right," she said with a wan smile, "if I had not been tired to start with. But the rush to get here in time, and missing my lunch——"

"You have had no lunch," he interposed wrathfully. "What—but we will not waste time in talking. Do you think you could walk to the restaurant just up the street?"

"Don't be angry with me, Mr. Enderby," she pleaded meekly, as he hurried her across the road. "I could not help it, really. When I got home to lunch, I found Mr. Oxenham's note awaiting me, and I had to take a hansom and hurry off at once, or I should have been late."

"I am not angry with *you*," he said with quick gentleness. "But I certainly think Miss Richardson might have cut you a sandwich. Cutting is so much in her line, you know."

"She wasn't back from her lecture when I left," returned the girl, seating herself at the little table the waiter pointed out to them. "And it never occurred to me to ask Mary."

"To look after yourself is the very last thing that ever would occur to you, I know," he observed reproachfully. "That is why I took it upon myself to order your lunch. If it had been left to you, I have no doubt that you would have asked for a cup of coffee and a bun."

"I am afraid I should," she confessed, looking across the narrow table with a mischievous smile. "But this soup is very nice. I feel a different person already."

"Of course you do," was the prompt response; "and you look a different person. I don't think my dearest foe could call me nervous, but your grey-white face in the theatre just now gave me an unpleasant shock, I admit."

"Oh," she said, with a look of anxiety, "I had quite forgotten the theatre. We are missing all the play. Hadn't we better go back at once?"

"Not till you have finished your soup," he answered firmly. "Don't worry, Miss Colet; the waits are always rather long at these *matinées*. I don't fancy we shall miss very much, and if we do, I can get Powell of the *Crescent* to supply me with all the details we shall want."

"I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't been there this afternoon," she said, her grey eyes beautiful in their unspoken gratitude. "I should have fainted ignominiously, I am afraid, and then Mr. Oxenham would have gone without his dramatic column altogether. As it is, he will owe it to you, for I have only a very hazy idea of that first act."

"I should think so," he returned, an unwonted tenderness in his deep voice. "You must have had about as much as you could manage in fighting against that faintness."

"Yes, but it is vanquished now," she cried gaily, picking up her

gloves ; "and I want to redeem my character before we see Patricia. She will be all anxiety to doctor me if she hears about it, and I have no longings for a course of beef-tea and invalid port."

"I will not betray you," he laughed, as they crossed the road. "But in return I want to extract a promise from you. If you find the heat in the smallest degree too much for you, will you let me know at once?"

"I will," she said gently. "It is very good of you to be so thoughtful for me. "But I hope I shall not give you any more trouble this afternoon."

"Don't say that," he rejoined quickly ; "and don't think it. Nothing that I could ever do for you would be a trouble to me, Miss Colet."

If Enderby had been of an introspective turn of mind he might have wondered why Marcia's white face had caused him such keen anxiety. As it was, her illness had alarmed, without enlightening him, and it was left to Ted Colet to perform that kindly office.

The young artist had lately become the proud possessor of a yacht, and in the kindness of his heart he was eager that his friends should share the benefit of it. His sole purpose on calling on Enderby this evening was to invite him on his first long cruise, and Gilbert's refusal to join the party gave him considerable annoyance.

"It's all humbug to say that you can't afford to take another holiday this year!" he declared, stooping to strike a vesta somewhat viciously against the sole of his highly-polished shoe. "It wouldn't cost you a penny, and that you know as well as I do."

"My dear fellow," returned Gilbert imperturbably, "I was not referring to the coin, but to the time at my disposal. I've got a pile of work in hand."

"I sha'n't care a hang for the trip if you don't come," said the other, puffing at his cigar moodily. "Look here, I always think ladies in the way on board a yacht ; but, to meet you, I'll get my sister to come and she shall invite Marcia. You won't be able to resist that, I know."

Enderby's imperturbability vanished in a moment. His friend's careless hand had torn the veil from his eyes, and in one blinding flash he read his own heart clearly. It was so sudden, so unlooked-for, that he was completely overwhelmed. As yet he did not look beyond the fact of his love for Marcia ; still he felt vaguely that life held now a meaning and a sweetness of which he had never dreamed before.

"I beg your pardon, old fellow, I didn't know you'd take it like this," said Colet apologetically. "It's been pretty evident to everyone, you know ; but I suppose I've put my foot into it as usual."

"There are some things one doesn't care to talk about with even one's closest friend," rejoined Gilbert, pulling himself together with an effort.

"Quite so," was the meek response; "I will not offend again. My only excuse is that I haven't been through the experience. I must be going now, old chap, but I wish you would leave the Norway question open for a day or two. If you *could* see your way to joining us, you would be doing a real act of charity."

Enderby had by this time regained some degree of composure, and he was now able to view the question in the comparatively calm light of reason. It was not to be supposed that his mind would dwell for long on his love for Marcia without a thought of her feelings towards him; and this consideration filled him with anxiety and doubt.

He knew her well enough to be aware that she had never thought of love and marriage except as an abstract question, far removed from all personal interest, and now to bring it home to her was a problem which bristled with difficulties. Her complete unconsciousness had always been her chief charm in Gilbert's eyes, but it now became his greatest obstacle in the path to a better understanding. What steps could he take to awaken her love? How could he woo her, when she would be as blind to his meaning as the simplest child?

The problem was still unsolved when he called on her next day, and her frankly cordial welcome did not do much towards its elucidation. It was with a quickened and a tenderer interest that he regarded her this afternoon, and he could study the sweet face unhindered as she bent over the table arranging his gift of flowers.

"One of my old Newnham friends was here this morning," she said, throwing him a laughing glance. "It would have amused you to hear the tone of pity she adopted towards Patricia and me. She is under the firm conviction that we are fast degenerating into utter barbarians."

"She is not alone in the belief that all culture, light and learning are confined to the universities," was his smiling response.

"She could not understand that London had its lessons to impart as well as Cambridge," continued the girl, seating herself near him by the open window. "But we are unconsciously learning lessons of one kind or another wherever we may live, I think."

"There is one lesson," he said, his voice thrilling with tenderness, "that we all learn sooner or later, I suppose. You will learn it one of these days, Miss Colet, and I would forfeit all my hopes in life if it were only given to me to teach it to you."

"I don't understand," she rejoined, raising her wondering eyes to his. "What study are you speaking of, Mr. Enderby?"

He leaned forward and took her slender hands in both his own.

"The lesson of love," he said very gently. "It is only lately that I have learnt it, and it is you who have taught it to me, Marcia. Whether it is to be the sweetest lesson of my life or the most painful, rests with you."

Her face was pale and troubled when he ended, but she did not withdraw her hands.

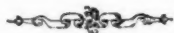
"I have never dreamed of this," she said at last quite simply. "I do not know how to answer you. But if I ever do learn the lesson, I think it will be you who will teach it to me."

"Do you know what your words mean?" he asked tremulously, holding her hands in a closer clasp. "Do you know you are bidding me hope?"

"Yes," she answered softly, her tender eyes lifted to his. "I seem to see more clearly into my heart now. I think—yes, I am sure that you may hope."

"My darling!" he cried passionately, pressing her hands to his lips. "My own darling!"

B. A. BARNETT.



RIVER SONG.

THE ripples break, the boat glides slow
Along the enchanted stream
To where the golden lilies glow,
And silver lilies gleam,
Where thick the sedge and iris grow,
As kisses in a dream.

Far off the blue-wreathed city spires
Rise in the burning sky.
Here is the joy that never tires,
The flower that cannot die;
Here joys for once outrun desires—
Since here are you and I.

All ruffled-white the swans sail past,
The clouds sail ruffled-white.
Oh, perfect hour that will not last,
Oh, fleeting dear delight!
Ah, that the day should fly so fast,
So slowly creep the night!

For in the night I wake alone,
And hear the sleepless stream,
And know myself the only one
To muse on hours that seem
As lightly grasped, as quickly gone
As treasures in a dream.

E. NESBIT.

THE CURATE'S LAST WORDS.



DEATH had been busy in the parish, a ravaging sickness had done its work and spared neither rich nor poor, old nor young. What was said of the Egyptians of old was almost true here; there was not a house in which there was not one dead.

But the epidemic had spent itself at last, its violence had abated, so that the doctors themselves now had time to be ill, and a congregation, almost wholly robed in black, had assembled on that Sabbath day to hold a memorial service for those who had passed away, and to give thanks for such as had survived.

The eye that travelled over the rows of close-filled seats fell upon none but grave and sorrowful countenances; the sternest hearts were softened at this time of trouble. During the reading of the prayers and singing of the hymns, many of the women were shaken to tears and sobs, and some of the men made furtive dashes at their eyes.

The time for the sermon came. It was expected that the rector would preach it; an elderly man, well beloved, whose own household had been thinned by the late plague. At the last moment he made some whispered communication to his curate, who bowed his head in response and rose to ascend the pulpit.

A thrill of disappointment and something akin to indignation went through the assembly. Not once only had the rector been admonished by influential members of the congregation that the young man had been guilty of levity in speaking of sacred subjects, and was much suspected of unsoundness in his views. His speedy dismissal was looked for, and it was felt that the rector was almost to be accused of disrespect in giving over the pulpit to him on such an occasion.

The last notes of the organ died away, and the curate stood in the pulpit gathering his thoughts together. He had no written sermon and had come unprepared to preach, nevertheless some words of what he did say lingered long in the memory of his hearers.

As he stood there, lit by the pathetic rays of gathering twilight, those who looked upon him were startled to see how wan and worn

he had grown; they had not realised how unceasing the toil of the clergy had been during all the trouble, even the toil of this young man, whom they blamed so seriously for flippancy.

There was silence in the church, silence almost as pregnant of thought as speech, and the curate looked down on those whom he was about to address with a deep and tender light in his dusky eyes. It was a look that embraced them all, singling out no individual, not even the woman with the sweet childish mouth, whose eyes yearned upon him from the shelter of a pillar. He was all-absorbed in his office and had no thought of personal love or hatred in his soul; he wore a look of exaltation that made even his detractors see him for once in the semblance of a prophet or an apostle.

He spoke his text in a voice of solemn sweetness: "If he sleep he shall do well." He added neither chapter nor verse, for he had not carried even a Bible into the pulpit with him.

He spoke the words and paused, and the very air of the church seemed to be full of listening ears.

"My friends," he said, "we cannot know the full meaning that these words bore to the Master's ear, this commonplace remonstrance of the disciples against the rashness of arousing a sick man from his sleep. But to us as we speak them to-night, they are full of comfort—of most precious comfort. How many who were of our number but three short months ago, are numbered now amongst those who sleep. It is good for us to realise that they do well.

"They have left us; we know it; our aching brows and aching hearts will not suffer us to forget it for an hour. They have left gaps in our ranks that never can be filled; none can take the place of father, husband, sister, daughter. From the very midst of life, while they were strong to counsel, love and comfort us, they are gone, with their work laid down, uncompleted, as it seems to us, laid down unwillingly as we know in some cases. 'Who will train my boys when I am gone?' spoke one troubled father. 'I'm woe to leave mother in her old age,' were well-nigh the last words of one anxious daughter. But Death, who makes all things clear, removed their cloud of doubt; they went and were not afraid. They sleep, and they do well.

"Whither went they? We know not; further than that they are in the hand of God, and that there they are very safe. We see them no more, but we know that they are gone to be nearer than we are to the Father and the Elder Brother. We wake and toss and turn in our trouble; ours the anguish and the loss and the long want, the yearning of dim eyes and the stretching forth of empty hands; but theirs the rest; they sleep and they do well.

"They sleep; their bodies in the pleasant earth of our churchyard where their fathers also sleep, with the greensward above them open to the warm sunshine and the kindly rain; their souls 'in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.' They

sleep, and in that sleep may well forget all the old pain and sorrow, and wrath and doubt and care, and misjudgment and hard words and doubtful deeds, and over anxious thought for the morrow. Or, if they do not forget, they see at last the other side of these things, as sometimes here on a summer afternoon the butterfly that we have long watched in vain and contemned for dingy colouring, spreads forth its wings and suffers us to see the rainbow glories of the upper side. They sleep and they do well.

"And we, dear friends, we who yet wake, shall also one day sleep. What manner of sleep are we preparing for ourselves? The old writer warns us that our life is as a very shadow that passeth away, and after our end there is no returning. We know it well, that there is no coming back to finish or amend whatever we have left. If it seem to us that some of those we mourn went unprepared, let us beware in time lest we go in like manner before we have set our house in order—lest the wrong that is unredressed through all the ages, lest the mistake be never atoned for while time lasts, lest the hard judgment that rests on bare suspicion be never examined and explained away.

"Even here amongst us, amongst us with our diminished numbers there be those who have not put away all malice and uncharitableness from their hearts, those who nurse doubt and grudging where love should be. And yet, friends, we who meet here to-night shall never all meet together again; never at least in bodily presence. We know not how near to us the spirits of our beloved may be. Put away now, even now, I beseech you, the distrust and the shadow of hatred from your hearts; love one another, the remnant of you who are left, now, even now; lest before the wings of night close round us it be too late; lest he who should be dear to you and is not, pass out of the church to-night to cross its threshold never more in life; lest he too sleep, a sleep so sound, that neither your prayers nor tears can stir it. Let him too turn his heart in tenderness towards his brother, that when he sleeps he may do well. Dear friends, most dear to me in very truth, I say to you once more; I say for the last time, 'Little children, love one another!'"

He ended. The air vibrated for awhile with the echoes of his deep tremulous voice. The people looking up saw his face gleam white from out the gloom; saw his brooding eyes fixed earnestly upon them, and a great awe and wonder seized their souls.

The sermon had not been what they expected; not what they would have had from the rector. It was startling; they were not quite sure that it was decorous; they were not quite sure that they understood it, but they were sure that for some ten minutes, they had stood face to face with this man's soul.

He gathered himself together, drew a long shuddering breath, and apparently forgetful of the usual hymn, pronounced the benediction and came swiftly down from the pulpit.

The rector rose to supply his omission and give out the hymn, and no one noticed that the woman from beside the distant pillar had pursued the curate to the vestry.

When the choir filed in they found him lying on the floor, with his head pillowed upon her knee. The sexton had brought water and between them they had recovered him from a fainting fit.

He put up his hand to catch at hers.

"You would none of me in my lifetime, Miriam," he said faintly.

"Not for lack of love," she answered in a low voice. "It was your doubts that I feared. You know I loved you, but I dared not tamper with my faith."

"There are more kinds of faith than one," he said wearily.

"Doctor Lennox is here, sir," spoke a choirman who had slipped away and returned.

They made way for the doctor, and the curate smiled up into the face that he had met beside so many dying beds.

"What use?" he said, and his voice was very low and uncertain. "Miriam—my darling—at last. What was I saying? The peace of God——"

The congregation had scarcely reached their homes, when the quiet of the night was broken by the tolling of the death-bell.

Men asked one another with startled faces, which other of their number was called away, and searched their consciences for the name of the enemy who was not forgiven.

Then they went back to discussion of the sermon. The preacher had been guilty of a sort of disrespect in making no allusion to such and such persons of importance who had been called away, and each man named those most nearly connected with himself. It might be charity to speak of all the dead as being gone home to one same place, but it was doubtful sort of doctrine; and he had owned himself doubtful as to what that place was. Still it was a better sermon than he had preached yet; more earnest and serious, and he was but a young man; with a little good advice he might do. The rector might give him a little longer trial.

And Doctor Lennox, with his work over in the vestry, had turned to the rector.

"I know, sir," he said, "that you are a good man and a true Christian, but it was that man, with the doubts, who taught me to believe."

"He never doubted," spoke Miriam sharply, looking up from where she knelt beside her friend. "It was we who could not understand."

E. E. KITTON.



